THE Hudson REVIEW

CARLOS DRUMMOND DE ANDRADE:
To a Hotel Scheduled for Demolition

J. E. CHAMBERLIN:
Oscar Wilde and the Importance of Doing Nothing

JOHN SIMON:
The Aesthetics of the Actor's Appearance

PATRICK CRUTTWELL:
Must We Burn the Literary Critics?

R. G. VLIET:
The Third Window—a story

Poems by WILLIAM STAFFORD, MARK VAN DOREN, PO FEI HUANG, ROBERT HASS, WENDELL BERRY, CHARLES TOMLINSON, W. S. MERWIN.

Reviews by WILLIAM DICKEY, ZULFIKAR GHOSE, B. H. HAGGIN, VERNON YOUNG, STEPHEN FARBER, WILLIAM H. PRITCHARD, JAMES P. DEGNAN.

RECEIVED
JUL 19 1972
CAL-STATE FULLERTON
PERIODICALS/LIBRARY

VOLUME XXV, NUMBER 2 • SUMMER 1972 • $2.00 PER COPY

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Neruda

SELECTED POEMS by Pablo Neruda. A bilingual edition edited by Nathaniel Tarn. Translators: Anthony Kerrigan, W. S. Merwin, Alastair Reid, Nathaniel Tarn. The most comprehensive collection in English of poetry by the 1971 Nobel Prize winner. Just published, $12.50.

Borges

SELECTED POEMS 1923-1967 by Jorge Luis Borges. A bilingual edition edited, with an introduction and notes, by Norman Thomas di Giovanni. The only comprehensive edition of Borges' poetry available in English. Just published, $12.50.

Céline

NORTH by Louis-Ferdinand Céline. Translated by Ralph Manheim. The first publication in English of an autobiographical novel depicting the moral and military collapse of Germany during the Second World War. Just published, $10.00. (also available in a translation by Ralph Manheim, CASTLE TO CASTLE, $7.50)

Delacorte Press/Seymour Lawrence Books

delacorte press
DELL PUBLISHING CO., INC.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

New from Columbia

TWENTIETH-CENTURY CHINESE STORIES
C. T. HSIA, EDITOR; JOSEPH S. M. LAU, ASST. EDITOR
Selected for their intrinsic literary interest and their representative importance in the development of the Chinese genre, the nine stories in this volume should impress upon the Western reader the strength and vitality of modern non-communist Chinese fiction.
cloth $10.00 paper $2.95

Companions to Asian Studies

TALES OF MOONLIGHT AND RAIN:
Japanese Gothic Tales
UYEDA AKINARI; TRANSLATED BY KENGI HAMADA
A collection of 9 eerie tales probing spiritual values and aberrations in a historical-traditional perspective. Based on well-known historical tales, these are retold in elegant prose, portraying the interaction of mores, superstitions and religious beliefs. $7.95

BLACK DRAMA ANTHOLOGY
WOODIE KING AND RON MILNER, EDITORS
An anthology of twenty-three plays by twenty-two of the best Black playwrights, including Langston Hughes and LeRoi Jones. The plays range widely in subject matter, from the historical past to the present, but are all rooted in the Black experience. $12.00

NEW COLUMBIA ESSAYS ON MODERN WRITERS:
No. 59 **Ramón del Valle-Inclán,** by Robert Lima
No. 60 **Ivan Turgenev,** by Charles A. Moser
No. 61 **Eugenio Montale,** by Glauco Cambon
No. 62 **Nikos Kazantzakis,** by Peter Bien
No. 63 **Ford Madox Ford,** by Grover Smith
No. 64 **Oscar Wilde,** by Kevin Sullivan
$1.00 each

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY PRESS
Address for orders: 136 South Broadway, Irvington, New York 10533

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Editor:

FREDERICK MORGAN

Managing Editor:

IRENE SKOLNICK

Associate Editor:

PAULA DEITZ

Assistant Editor:

CHARLOTTE WIGGERS

Editorial Board:

MARY EMMA ELLIOTT
MARIUS BEWLEY
HAYDEN CARRUTH
ROGER SALE

Associate:

EDMUND T. DELANEY

Contributing Editors:

B. H. HAGGIN, *Music and Ballet*
JOHN SIMON, *Theatre*
VERNON YOUNG, *Film*

THE HUDSON REVIEW is published quarterly by The Hudson Review, Inc., 65 East 55th Street, New York, N. Y. 10022. It is a member of The Council of Literary Magazines and is indexed in the Social Sciences and Humanities Index.

Subscription $7.00 per year in U. S.; foreign including Canada $8.00. Single copy $2.00. U. S. distributor: B. De Boer, 188 High Street, Nutley, N. J. 07110. Subscriptions in England: B. H. Blackwell, Ltd., The Broad Street, Oxford. Back issues and reprints of Volumes I—XXIII available from AMS Press, Inc., 56 East 13th Street, New York, N. Y. 10003. Microfilms of Volumes I—XXIII available from University Microfilms, Inc., 300 N. Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, Mich. 48106.

Manuscripts will not be returned unless accompanied by stamped, self-addressed envelopes. No responsibility is assumed for their loss or injury.

Opinions expressed by contributors are not necessarily those of the editors.

Printed in the United States of America. Printing office: 2901 Byrdhill Road, Richmond, Virginia 23261. Second Class postage paid at Richmond, Virginia.

Registered U. S. Patent Office.

Copyright © 1972 by The Hudson Review, Inc.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

VOLUME XXV
NUMBER 2
SUMMER 1972

THE Hudson Review

Essays

Oscar Wilde and the Importance of Doing Nothing — J. E. CHAMBERLIN — 194

The Aesthetics of the Actor's Appearance — JOHN SIMON — 247

Story

The Third Window — R. G. VLIET — 225

Translation

To a Hotel Scheduled for Demolition — CARLOS DRUMMOND DE ANDRADE — 186
Translated by Thomas Colchie

Poems

The Garden of My Own Mind; And All the While; The Possessed, MARK VAN DOREN, 184; In the White Sky; Sleeping on the Sisters Land; Friend; Weeds; The Escape, WILLIAM STAFFORD, 219; Rower; Le Rendez-vous des Paysages; La Promenade de Protée; Hawks, CHARLES TOMLINSON, 222; Concerning the Afterlife the Indians of Central California Had Only the Dimmest Notion; The Pornographer; The Pornographer, Melancholy; The Pornographer at the End of Winter; Politics of a Pornographer, ROBERT HASS, 239; Count One; Elegy in November; The Winter Solstice; Words; Anxiety; June Day; In the Woods, PO FEI HUANG, 243; The Strangers; Leaving Home, WENDELL BERRY, 260; Summits; Dogs, W. S. MERWIN, 262.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Chronicles

Hands Across the Sea	VERNON YOUNG	263
Mondrian	CHARLES W. MILLARD	270
Music and Ballet	B. H. HAGGIN	275
The Old Ultra-Violence	STEPHEN FARBER	287

Reviews

Public and Private Poetry	WILLIAM DICKEY	295
Ghalib	ZULFIKAR GHOSE	309
Paradise Lost	WILLIAM H. PRITCHARD	320
Must We Burn the Literary Critics?	PATRICK CRUTTWELL	323
Fiction Chronicle	JAMES P. DEGNAN	330
Here They Are	MARVIN MUDRICK	338

Joseph Bennett, 1922-1972 183

Letters to the Editor 350

Notes on Contributors 351

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Spiritualism in American Literature, 1850-1900

HOWARD KERR. Nineteenth-century spiritualism was a lively, heterodox movement claiming empirical proof of immortality. After explaining why the millenarian 1850s and the agnostic 1870s were especially ripe for spiritualism, Kerr traces for the first time in breadth and detail the personal and literary responses of American writers to spiritualism — from Lowell, Hawthorne, Brownson, and Melville to Howells, Bellamy, Twain, and James.

1972. 250 pages. $8.95

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS PRESS Urbana Chicago London

"An unusual book in every respect"*

Something Else

By Jonathan Bishop

SOMETHING ELSE is about "making contact with the world." In the words of the author "it is concerned with various things that happen, like thinking, measuring, looking, pretending, riding a bike, being interrupted, meeting people, making friends...."

SOMETHING ELSE "works through autobiography to become 'something else'—an analytical philosophical overview of the ways in which the elements we take for granted in our daily lives become alive and meaningful.... Bishop acknowledges *The Education of Henry Adams* as a personal favorite, and his own book, anecdotal, filled with nostalgic and intellectual fantasy, reads somewhat like his favorite. Youthful readers especially will be attracted to the insights and stimuli he provides."—**Publishers' Weekly*

Cloth **$8.95** / *Paper* **$2.45**

George Braziller NEW YORK

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

NEW DIRECTIONS 24 Anthology

"For some 40 years 'New Directions in Prose and Poetry,' always guided by the discriminating hand of James Laughlin, has been introducing us to some of the world's finest prose and poetry. Every volume is a magazine in book form. This latest volume has lowered the standards not one whit."—*Independent Press Telegram*

"The first story in this exciting collection has more wit, social observation, insight and art in it than most such anthologies all put together. . . . Other stories, essays, and poetry are on the same high level."—*Publishers' Weekly*

New Directions 24 includes:

JÜRGEN BECKER: *Margins.* A complete "text" by one of West Germany's most influential *avant-garde* writers. Tr. by A. Leslie Willson.

EDWIN HONIG: *Orpheus Below.* A verse play in four scenes, based on classical themes.

ATTILA JÓZSEF: "Nine Poems." A selection representing a chronology in brief of the pre-World War II Hungarian poet's work.

YUMIKO KURAHASHI: "The Ugly Devils." A short story from *Scorpions* (1968). Tr. by Samuel Grolmes and Yumiko Tsumura.

ELIO PAGLIARANI: "Four Poems." Work by a leading Italian poet associated with "Gruppo 63." Tr. by Fausta Segré.

JAMES PURDY: "Poem." Verse by the author of *Children Is All, Color of Darkness* and *I Am Elijah Thrush.*

EDOUARD RODITI: "The Vampires of Istanbul." An amusing satire on epistolary feuds.

POEMS BY: Douglas Blazek, Carlos Bousoño, Peter Glassgold, Daniel Halpern, Aleksis Rannit, John Ratti, and John Taggart.

PROSE BY: Alain Arias-Misson, E. M. Beekman, Benjamin Haimowitz, Jay Peter Olwyler, Junichiro Tanizaki, Nancy Willard, and William Witherup.

Clothbound, $8.95—Paperbook, $3.45

NEW DIRECTIONS 333 Sixth Avenue, New York 10014

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

JOSEPH BENNETT, 1922-1972

Shortly after our Spring issue had come off press, word reached us of the death of Joseph Bennett on March 28, 1972, in the Royal Hospital, Perth, Australia, where he had been confined for two months with a serious illness.

Bennett was a founding editor of THE HUDSON REVIEW, who served actively in an editorial capacity until 1966, when he left the United States for an indefinite sojourn abroad. He traveled widely in Europe and the Near East, and for the last three years of his life had been living in Southeast Asia.

His contribution to this Review is difficult to overstate. As an editor, he was fair and open-minded, and at the same time intolerant of mediocrity and fashionable posturing. He took a broad and effective interest in every aspect of the magazine, but his particular concern was with poetry, of which he was an able practitioner and discriminating judge. In the early days of our publication, his energy and enthusiasm were invaluable in helping the magazine extend its influence and reach out into new areas.

As a man, Joseph Bennett was humorous, affectionate, opinionated, eccentric: a scintillating wit and unsurpassed raconteur. Possessed of a great fund of historical knowledge, he took delight in the characteristic textures of particular times and places, which he absorbed and made his own. As his letters and journals amply testify, his connoisseurship, his great talent for enjoyment, reached their fruition in these last years of travel.

We feel the loss keenly; I mourn my friend of thirty years.

—FREDERICK MORGAN

"The Tomb of the Diver," a travel journal written by Joseph Bennett shortly before his last illness, will be published in the Winter, 1972-73 issue of The Hudson Review.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

MARK VAN DOREN

The Garden of My Own Mind

The garden of my own mind—
Who tends it, for it isn't me?
Who changes it by night, by day?
Who kills it then who gives it life:
Newborn color, and strength again?

Every flower in it can die—
Has died. And been by whom replaced?
I wish I knew; I'd worship death
Could I be told his other name:
The one that brings the freshness in,

The one that helps me to forget
Whatever died, as all things do
Except these now that are my own,
Except these blossoms that I breathe,
Except all this that is my life.

And All the While

And all the while,
Down under,
Something lives
That I can't see,
Though it is mine,
Though it is me.

Without me here
It wouldn't be there;
But neither could I
Be more than I am—
Which is what I desire—
Were I wholly alone.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I must not try
Too hard or too long,
Or even at all,
To guess what it is:
So ancient, so still,
So known and unknown.

The Possessed

The strength in me is not mine.
Not anybody's. It is too much
For one heart to hold, for one
Mind to make welcome here
In the world where strength is a strange thing—
Listen. This is not me talking,
Not even the wind, not even waves
Breaking. What you hear and see
Is the truth coming through, the iron
Entering, then lingering, then
Leaving on its terrible errand
To others, who will know it is not
Their own, it is so strong, so strange,
So cruel; and beautiful past bearing.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

CARLOS DRUMMOND DE ANDRADE

To a Hotel Scheduled for Demolition

Goodbye, Hotel Avenida.
Your guests await you
on some other horizon.

You were huge and red,
in each room you had
a curious mirror.

In it was reflected
the passage of each figure
and the rest not to be read

even through the cracks
in the door: what one hides,
pulp of self, and shrieks

without making a sound.
And by adding other faces
in continuous succession,

the mirror wore a thousand masks
of Minas Gerais, Rio and São Paulists: good and bad: faces.

50 image-years
and 50 on folding
bed 50 with trundles

nocturnal and confident
humbly preserving for us
the uric-acid truth.

(But you lived a long time, Hotel, and in your paunch
whatever was noxious would smile in the dust within you.)

The slow and crimson alexandrine decomposed.

Couples coupling together in the whispering
Carioca[1] smut, streetcars sparksmelling, politicians
politicianing along insipid corridors

[1] Carioca: Rio de Janeiro.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Italian starlets, doormen in ecstasy
elevator-
boys in a panic:
how is such voluptuousness to fit itself
into those four flimsy paneled partitions?
Trays go by silverundulating:
Give me some coffee marmalade morning papers I don't care.
The woman was naked in the center of the room and received
me with the appropriate solemnity of travelling deities:
Stellen Sie es auf den Tisch!

No, I was not your room servant, not even some
boy in your network of communications or a
setting in the daily fuss of prandial service.
Then how is it I'm living out your archives
and feeling cheated really that I never was
in your register the way the dead
are in their numbered compartments?

I act out love affairs I never had
but in you were had pell-mell.
The way the snail
of memories oozes on
down the stairs
from the two-hundred thousand bodies lodged within you
records recordsds recordsdsds recordsdsdsds
dsdsdsdsdsdsdsdsds
137 is buzzing
hurry the man is dying
is it aspirins? a priest he wants?
No, not if he's a priest himself and is praying
for the sake of the sins of this hotel
and of any other hotel along the road
which man travels from one to another, which at no
point has beginning or ending;
and is only the road and always always
is populated with gestures and departures
and arrivals and fleeing and mileage.
He prays he dies and in solitude
a faucet
drips

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and the shower
showers
and the blue
flame of gas heater hisses in the bath
above Carioca Square in flower in the sun.

(Through the scaffolding I see you
not broken disembowled defiled
imagining you unharmed
emerging from the marching sambas of the military police, from
the howling chorus of fans on the radio
broadcast of the world's championship
offering to one and all, Hotel Avenida,
an unfading victory laurel.)

You were Time itself and you presided
over the fevered recognition of fingers
love without any real place in the city
over collusion of swindlers, over the expectancy
of employment, over stagnation of governments
over the life of the nation in terms of the individual
and over mass movements which came spilling their ways
into the monastic arcade which houses your streetcars.

You were the heart of Brazil,
Carioca nostalgias rocked back and forth
in your lap, diamond buyers came to you
entrusting their stones, cattle drovers
grazed their herds on the terrace
and the sticky sweetness of provincial tears
was packed away each instant in envelopes
(blue ones?) into the management's pigeonholes
and you were a lot of coffee and some promissory notes.

What professor professes the Law of Things
in some illusive alcove, lecturing
to cockroaches too busy to listen?
What flute insists upon playing its sonatina
without piano always after curfew hour?
And the manias of the oldest lodgers
who are visited at night by Chief Prefect Passos to discuss
the latest urban developments?

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

And your dead guests
incomparably hotel dead defrauded
of that familial death to which we aspire
as if to some kind of not-dead-death;
the dead who must be dispatched
quickly, so as not to contaminate sheets
and cupboards
with that peculiar chilliness which encompasses them
and there must be no memory in this bed
of whatever is not simply life at Avenida.

Hear the litany of intestinal bubbles?

Balcony of messengers immobile boatmen
newsstand news for never and more
white laundry rooms with fluted remains
bonbonnières *where silver wrappings*
form serenades on feminine lips
telephonic switchboard sullenly aphonic
discotheque *lamentation of slipped discs*
stationery shops
conversation corners
Brahma beer best brand for a loving man
and the Bar Nacional's simple amiability is
suddenly resurrecting Mário de Andrade[2]
What to do with the clock
what to do with ourselves
without time without some point
without counterpoint without
a measure of extension
or even an obituary
while in ashes the
impatient bison flees
whom no one's ever held
by the horns, affliction?
He marks time mar-
king-king-king
and we alone are marked
with all the failures
of repressed loves

[2] Mário de Andrade (1893-1945): poet, novelist, essayist and founder of Brazilian Modernism (1922).

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

clock which I cannot hear
which will not listen
robot of simple smell
tracking the immense
country of motionless touch
the directions I ran
at your command now end
in the crossing of a T
in vague nightmares
in dejected shadows
where all of our intentions
somehow became stratified.

There's no destroying you
the way termites chew up
book earth existence.
Your hands, yes, voraciously
they scrape away at
the tunic of Venus
the large hand the small
this tattooed verse
and everything I've done
to elude you and everything
in the arkademies the
autarchic institutions
historic and astute
which is taught with malice
concerning the evolution of things
oh hotel clock keeper
god of the cautious man from Minas,
silence.
propriety.

But everything you offended
now avenges itself upon you
deliberately
with the black arts of witchery.
We swallow your windows
stifling the utterance
of splintering glass which

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

still struggles, throbbing,
for the moment of hope
when in the evening the breeze
of hoping has passed.

Scream of a child being born.

Please, my poet friend Martins Fontes, can you recite your odes a little lower while my wife finishes giving birth in the room above, and the poet did softly sing, but when the baby came into the world it was the father who was dancing poetry and asking his poet friend to celebrate before all, guests, maids and sparrows alike, with uplifting song the gratifying inspiration.

Your night would fall. At the crossroads, there down below, ragpickers, jacks-of-all-trades, lottery-vendors sat swallowing their prizes with a sip of rum.

Mujer malvada, yo te mataré! *actors rehearsing in their rooms?* I will grind your bones to dust, and with your blood and it I'll make a paste.[3] *A bunch of trash downstairs.*

Every hotel is flow. A current
passes through walls, carrying the man
his emanations of substance. Every hotel
is dead, is born again; passing; if pigeons
stop over in one, they inhabit what is not to be inhabited
but merely severed. Other houses take hold
and let themselves be possessed or try to, awkwardly.
Space attempts to fix itself. Life becomes spatialized,
models itself on sentimental crystals.
The doors close every blessed night.
You fail to shut yourself, you cannot. Every minute
someone says goodbye to your unfaithful armoires
and the new arrivals already have return tickets in their bags.
220 *Fremdenzimmer* and you see yourself always empty
and the mirror is reflecting another mirror
and the corridor is leading to another corridor
man when naked indefinitely.

[3] English in the original.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

In the heart of Rio de Janeiro
absence
in the cattle stockade of streetcars
absence
in the procession of Saturdays
in the rubbing and clanking of carnival groups
absence
in the arias of Palermo
in the wail of evening papers
absence
worm consuming apple
worm consuming worm
self-consuming worm
worm worms worm

and the anxiety of finish, which has no hope
of that velvet termination of old ruins
or the quick burst of death from hydrogen.

You were Amazonian solitude
getting-to-be home
in getting-to-be city where lizards.
Come on, old Malta
snap a picture for me
pulverashen effigimage
of this obscure place.

Add a few kiosks
turn-of-the-century
no waternymphs or forests
but pitifully lice-ridden.

For an inscription
ITATIAIA CHEESE
and whatever else spells
a servile condition.

For these halls, so ugly
much more than dirty
are twisted cells
molluscoid conches

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of donkey without a tail
ignorantly in bondage
and some poor devil
within, hunger without.

Old Malta, *s'il vous plaît,*
get another shot:
the hotel marquee
bigger than the Rio Apa.

Still not struck there
in your ethereal seat,
Malta, sub-reptitiously,
by that super-construction

which looms out of the ground?
Give me your future picture,
since the urgent thing is to

document each successive possession of place up to the final judgment and even beyond if there is such a thing as three times three our belief in a supreme bureau of records for fixed properties going beyond the human instant and the pulverization of the galaxies.

How is it I remember you so completely when
I never placed a single stone upon stone of you?
But your name—AVENIDA—followed the lead
of my verse and was ampler with more

forms than your accommodations contained
(time degraded them and death saves them),
and where the foundation has fallen and the instant
fled I am compromised forever.

I am compromised forever
I who for so many years have been in and out
the Grand Hotel of the World without manager

in which, nothing concrete existing,
—avenida, avenida—I house
tenaciously the secret guest of me.

—*Translated by Thomas Colchie*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

J. E. CHAMBERLIN

Oscar Wilde and the Importance of Doing Nothing

> It is often said that force is no argument. That, however, entirely depends on what one wants to prove.
>
> —Oscar Wilde

IT IS JUST NINETY YEARS SINCE Oscar Wilde visited North America, in the year 1882, one of a distinguished line of impoverished celebrities who have, since the early nineteenth century, travelled to the New World to improve their own balance of payments. He was born in 1854, in Dublin, the son of a benighted (and rather Orange) father, and a mother who apparently wished for herself nothing more than literary fame, and a daughter. The story of his life has never been well told. Robert Ross, his devoted friend and literary executor, and the most logical contemporary biographer, did not try, because he remembered Wilde's comment that "every great man has his disciples, and it is always Judas who writes the biography" ("The Critic as Artist"). But there were other Judases, more adept; and Wilde's greater fear was even more fully realized, that a legion of Guildensterns would survive, to talk over the grave of Hamlet.

Indeed, it was only on the continent that Wilde escaped the biographical Guildenstern, the provincial Rosencrantz, the minor Judas. England wished that Wilde, reclaimed by civilization (through the good offices of Reading Gaol) like some slough that had recently been drained, would turn to the editing of prayers for those at sea. Europe, on the other hand, blossomed forth with pirated or occasionally authorised editions of nearly all of his works, and saw new truths where others had seen only trash; or, as Hart Crane wrote of Charlie Chaplin, saw "the moon in lonely alleys make/ A grail of laughter of an empty ash can."

Wilde's popularity was indisputable. *The Picture of Dorian Gray* was translated into Czech, Danish, Dutch, Finnish, French, German, Italian, Polish, Russian, and Swedish by 1906; and into

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Greek, Hungarian, and Yiddish by 1912. And it was not just in literary circles that Wilde was known. The Swiss painter Paul Klee took the trouble to memorize the entire Preface to *Dorian Gray,* and long passages from *De Profundis;* while the Russian artist Wassily Kandinsky quoted Goethe and Wilde together in support of the major proposition in his influential book *The Art of Spiritual Harmony,* published in 1912. *The Soul of Man Under Socialism,* another favourite among the Masters of the Bauhaus such as Klee, Kandinsky, and Oscar Schlemmer, had its passionate devotees in Tsarist Russia; and Richard Strauss modelled his opera after Wilde's *Salomé.* Thomas Mann praised Wilde's work extravagantly, likening him to Nietzsche; and André Gide was influenced by him more than he cared to admit.

Despite the obvious, not to say irresistible, temptation to follow the critically uneasy Gide, and reflect that Wilde spent his genius in his life, and only his talent in his art, it was not his life that attracted a lasting attention on the continent—nor, eventually, in England. His life was pitiful, to be sure, yet it was manifestly at the disposal of others, whether those others were that beast, the public; or Alfred Douglas; or Edward Carson and Mr. Justice Wills. And it was so because, as Wilde discovered too late, he had chosen that it be so. His art, on the other hand, was perhaps at times a poor thing, but his own. At its best, it was, in his words,

> the great primal note by which I had revealed, first myself to myself, and then myself to the world; the real passion of my life; the love to which all other loves were as marshwater to red wine, or the glow-worm of the marsh to the magic mirror of the moon.[1]

And in speaking of his art, Wilde naturally included his criticism; naturally, for he thought that the highest criticism,

> being the purest form of personal impression, is in its way more creative than creation, as it has least reference to any standard external to itself, and is, in fact, its own reason for existing, and, as the Greeks would put it, in itself, and to itself, an end. ["The Critic as Artist"]

But Wilde's life and his art (or criticism) are not easily separated. Indeed, it is one of the chief accomplishments of Wilde's writing that he relentlessly insists on that interrelationship between life and art which is germane to the preservation of both. This inter-

[1] *The Letters of Oscar Wilde,* ed. Rupert Hart-Davis (London, 1962), p. 447.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

relationship obtains in the true and humane values of each, and is very fragile. Often, in both his life and his art, Wilde did not immediately recognize when these values were in jeopardy; and then, when he did, it was on at least one occasion too late. As Bertrand Russell commented some years after Wilde's death,

> the Chinese constantly remind me of [him] in his first trial when he thought wit would pull one through anything, and found himself in the grip of a great machine that cared nothing for human values.[2]

Wilde would have liked the comparison. He admired wit, instinctively knowing that wit preserves all that is individual and egotistic in the highest sense. (It was this quality of wit, with its interest both social and aesthetic, that Freud discussed so often in his writings, and which was later called in fashionably clinical terms "regression in the service of the ego.") And Wilde admired the dilettante in himself and in others, seeing it as a pose of incomparable value, a defense against the fanaticism of the serious and the earnest.

Most importantly, perhaps, Wilde admired the Chinese sage and mystic Chuang Tzŭ, one of the founders (along with the legendary Lao Tzŭ) of the Taoist tradition of Chinese thought. The writings of Chuang Tzŭ had recently been made available to English readers by Herbert Giles, whose curious translation combined the language of William Blake with the logic of William Butler Yeats. In his review of this translation, Wilde noted that the sage

> spent his life in preaching the great creed of Inaction, and in pointing out the uselessness of all useful things. "Do nothing, and everything will be done," was the doctrine which he inherited from his great master Lao Tzŭ. To resolve action into thought, and thought into abstraction, was his wicked transcendental aim. Like the obscure philosopher of early Greek speculation, he believed in the identity of contraries [a phrase which Giles used for a chapter title in his translation]; like Plato, he was an idealist, and had all the idealist's contempt for utilitarian systems; he was a mystic like Dionysius and Jacob Böhme. . . . In fact, Chuang Tzŭ may be said to have summed up in himself almost every mood of European metaphysical or mystical thought, from Heraclitus down to Hegel.[3]

This "great creed of Inaction," as Wilde called it, embodies an insight which he felt to be of the very highest order, whether ap-

[2] *The Autobiography of Bertrand Russell*, Vol. II (London, 1968), p. 140.

[3] From a review of *Chuang Tzu: Mystic, Moralist, and Social Reformer* (trans. Herbert A. Giles), written by Wilde for the *Speaker*, February 8, 1890.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

plied to artistic or social concerns. "When we have fully discovered the laws that govern life," he wrote several months later, "we shall realise that the one person who has more illusions than the dreamer is the man of action. . . . In the sphere of action a conscious aim is a delusion"; and action should therefore be recognised as "the last resource of those who know not how to dream" ("The Critic as Artist"). This insight was part of Taoist thought, and was represented by the concept of "actionless activity," which is one characteristic of the Tao, and which enables the Tao to be both fixed and moving at the same time, "the still point of the turning world," which it also circumscribes and contains. In a broader scheme, this concept represents a moment of paradoxical intensity or creative insight, the kind of moment that Wilde celebrates in virtually all of his work, and the kind which often finds its paradigm in Dance. I suspect that this is why *Salomé* was such an important work to Wilde. At any rate, from Mallarmé to Yeats, from Symons to Valéry,[4] the dancer was seen to embody this same paradoxical insight that Wilde applauded in the writings of Chuang Tzŭ, until eventually T. S. Eliot provided something like a final statement when he wrote in *Burnt Norton* of the ultimate "identity of contraries," where there is "neither arrest nor movement," and

> . . . there is only the dance . . .
> The inner freedom from the practical desire,
> The release from action and suffering, release from the inner
> And the outer compulsion, yet surrounded
> By a grace of sense, a white light still and moving,
> *'Erhebung'* without motion, concentration
> Without elimination, both a new world
> And the old made explicit . . .

[4] In Paul Valéry's Dialogue *Dance and the Soul,* Socrates suggests that the dance of Athikte embodies "the instant between speech and silence"; and continues, to give a statement which might well be a description of the Taoist ideal:

> Without doubt the unique and perpetual object of the soul is that which does not exist: that which was and no longer is; that which will be and is not yet; that which is possible, and impossible—all that is the soul's concern—but never, *never* that which is! (*Dialogues,* trans. William McCausland Stewart, New York, 1956, p. 57).

In *Chuang Tzu,* Giles translates that "Tao cannot be conveyed by either words or silence. In that state which is neither speech nor silence its transcendental nature may be apprehended."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Words move, music moves
Only in time; but that which is only living
Can only die. Words, after speech, reach
Into the silence. Only by the form, the pattern,
Can words or music reach
The stillness, as a Chinese jar still
Moves perpetually in its stillness.

These clusters of paradoxes were the basis of the old Taoist, and in fact traditional Chinese, idea of *"wu wei,"* "outer passivity and inner activity," or what was sometimes called "action in non-action" by western interpreters. As one Chinese scholar notes, *"wu wei* follows quite naturally the basic Chinese belief in a patterned and ordered universe, in which everything has its place and draws on a common source of life."[5] Now this formulation, in its way, straddles one of the central confusions of aesthetic and artistic criticism in this century, a century on whose doorstep Wilde died. For it is both essentially classical in its emphasis on a patterned and ordered universe; and just as essentially romantic in its recognition of the nature of organic forms, of that which "draws on a common source of life," rather than that which imitates an ordered and final product. It has been most usual in the twentieth century to view these two attitudes as irrevocably opposed, and such a view has certainly had its influence on political and anthropological speculation and terminology. Wilde, however, saw more deeply into the problem. On a superficial level, he refused to oppose the classical to the romantic—refused even to use these categories. More fundamentally, he took refuge in the perpetual capacity of art, and of the highest art criticism, to ignore these confusions and encompass these contraries. In his essay on "The Truth of Masks," he affirmed that

> a Truth in art is that whose contradictory is also true. And just as it is only in art-criticism, and through it, that we can apprehend the Platonic theory of ideas, so it is only in art-criticism, and through it, that we can realise Hegel's system of contraries. The truths of metaphysics are the truths of masks.

And now let us turn to a few of these truths.

One of the most celebrated, and certainly one of the most intransigent, dichotomies in art is that which exists between form

[5] Mai-mai Sze, *The Tao of Painting* (New York, 1963), p. 17.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and content, between style and subject. Both are necessarily incorporate in a work of art, and although inseparable in a genuine aesthetic experience, are ordinarily separated for the purposes of analysis. This separation usually brings to light contradictory impulses and energies both in the artist and in the critical intelligence which is studying the work of art. Such contradictory energies are then said to embody ironies; or tensions between archetype and prototype, or between the conscious and the unconscious, according to one's critical persuasion (or, perhaps more honestly, one's critical training). Wilde approached these contradictions in a more circumspect manner, first through style and then through subject, and arrived at a perspective which he liked to think was essentially critical, and which certainly was quite basically paradoxical, with all of the ironies and tensions which such paradox brings with it.

Generally, Wilde anticipated the work of the German art critic Wilhelm Worringer, though he put his case much less crudely, and much more persuasively. Worringer's astoundingly influential book, *Abstraction and Empathy* (subtitled "A Contribution to the Psychology of Style"), was first published in Germany in 1908, and was, with Kandinsky's *The Art of Spiritual Harmony*, at the center of artistic and aesthetic discussion in Europe during the early years of this century, establishing the terms of reference (as well as the terminology) for the interminable European debate about art and culture which preceded the Second World War, and which carries on still. (Because he defined historical periods in art and culture in a novel way, Worringer's work was also recognized as having important political and social implications.) He distinguished between what he saw as the "urge to abstraction," which he identified with primitive and oriental art, and the "urge to empathy," which he (following Theodor Lipps) associated with both classical art and romantic aesthetics. Since he was dealing primarily with the pictorial arts, most of Worringer's illustrations are drawn from this medium. Accordingly, he saw the "urge to abstraction" as arising from "an immense spiritual dread of space," which takes refuge in the creation of geometrically regular forms; and the "urge to empathy" as arising from a profound dissatisfaction with the limitations of individual being and perspective, which takes refuge in an identification with other, generally organic, forms of life.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

For Worringer, these two complementary impulses effectively defined the limits of art. In turn, these were recognized (though not by Worringer) as providing a nice aesthetic version of impulses which are of more general cultural and social interest. Yet Worringer's aesthetic analysis is itself important, because it redefined those grotesque dialectical contraries which had hypnotized nineteenth-century philosophy and ethics; and redefined them in such a way as to make them available to something other than a ping-pong intelligence. This redefinition was accomplished, quite simply, by his showing the existence of these contrary impulses in the creation of, and response to, a work of art.

There was another analysis contemporary with Worringer's, and although its subject and scope were ostensibly quite different, and much more general, it was of a remarkably similar nature. Germane to Worringer's argument was the assumption that art is *sui generis;* and further, that it is neither determined nor constrained by conditions external to itself: conditions of public utility or morality, for example. Whatever utility or morality art contained was private; and not just private, but entirely embodied in, and exhausted by, its own formal resources. In sociological terms, such a function is usually associated with leisure activities, and it was the economist Thorstein Veblen, in his *Theory of the Leisure Class,*[6] who first recognized a dualism in the "product" of leisure, or what he called "luxury," through a critical analysis in all important respects analogous to Worringer's.

We shall discuss Veblen presently. But it is important at the outset to realize that both Worringer and Veblen were trying, in their respective ways and disciplines, to illustrate what they felt were *contrary* psychological or aesthetic, and sociological, impulses. Worringer saw these, on the one hand, as a retreat into abstraction, or abstract form, a reaction from the world external to the self (the "dreadful space"); and, on the other, as an equally defensive involvement in organic forms. The impulses which Veblen recognized were little different in kind, though they naturally were in reference. On the one hand, he identified in leisure a retreat into activities (luxuries) which were essentially useless and impractical, through indulgence in "conspicuous consumption," an abstract form of consumption which, because abstract, is un-

[6] Originally published in 1899; reprinted four times, and then revised in 1912.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

influenced by criteria of necessity or practicality. Veblen viewed this as a reaction from a society which imposed an exclusive emphasis on useful and practical choices; a refuge into personal and formal expression without reference to the all too insistent and haphazard demands of life. On the other hand, Veblen saw in leisure an equally defensive affirmation of something other than the selfish or the utilitarian, through an involvement in interests and activities which, being of an essentially organic character, are not subject to the prerogatives and demands of what society defines as self-interest, utility, or morality; interests and activities which often seem to those who do not embrace them as hopelessly decadent, slothful, or socially suicidal.

What neither Worringer nor Veblen realized was that these seemingly contrary tendencies (or psychological impulses) are interdependent, rather than independent; that they are interwoven, like warp and woof. It was to this interwoven texture that Oscar Wilde continually drew attention, in most disconcerting ways; and it is here that the importance of his work most certainly lies. In the same tradition as Wilde, and with the same sense of paradox and irony, was the distinguished German sociologist Theodor W. Adorno, who provides a nice complement to Wilde, as Veblen does to Worringer. But we must first return to Worringer, and his ideas about "abstraction" and "empathy."

Dealing first with abstract expression, Worringer regarded this as the consequence of what he called the self-alienative impulse, which at the turn of the century was considered by cultural anthropology to be primitive in man. In his words,

> in the urge to abstraction the intensity of the self-alienative impulse is incomparably greater and more consistent. Here it is not characterised, as in the need for empathy, by an urge to alienate oneself from individual being, but as an urge to seek deliverance from the fortuitousness of humanity as a whole, from the seeming arbitrariness of organic existence in general, in the contemplation of something necessary and irrefragable.[7]

Such an impulse is simply a version of what the poet Wallace Stevens termed the "rage to order," what early twentieth-century psychologists called *"Gestaltungsdrang,"* or what Wilde called "egotism," which oppose an individual (or cultural) imaginative

[7] *Abstraction and Empathy*, trans. Michael Bullock (New York, 1953), pp. 23-4. The original German title was *Abstraktion und Einfühlung*.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

energy creative of some order, to the anarchy of the world outside the self. Thus, on one level, geometric designs appear on primitive shelters; and, on another, elegiac, pastoral, and witty metaphysical poems are written. Wilde's cavalier version (which illustrates, almost accidentally, the familiar model of the mind as a mansion) is that "egotism, which is so necessary to a proper sense of human dignity, is entirely the result of indoor life. . . . Nature is so indifferent, so unappreciative" ("The Decay of Lying").

This impulse, then, creates that art in which the element of style is foremost, since whatever form is created or perceived will bear a determinate subjective (and probably cultural) stamp. In more general terms, style is then recognized as the signature of faith or personality, depending on whether the art is sacred or profane. Hence, the nineteenth-century voices of Cardinal Newman, crying that "forms are the food of faith," or of Walter Pater, proposing that only the experience itself is of value, are really identical, since the kind of experience Pater had in mind was intensely ritualistic, appealed to a particular need, and was a culturally stylised version of natural or ordinary experience. It follows therefore, since style is the signature of faith or personality, that "Truth is entirely and absolutely a matter of style. . . . It is style that makes us believe in a thing—nothing but style" ("The Decay of Lying"). An art which follows these canons, where form and style are of fundamental importance, deliberately rejects the crude imitation of nature (Wilde considered Hamlet's proposal that art holds a mirror up to nature as a pose of absolute insanity in all matters concerning art). Such an art is essentially decorative. "My own experience," wrote Wilde,

> is that the more we study Art, the less we care for Nature. What Art really reveals to us is Nature's lack of design, her curious crudities, her extraordinary monotony, her absolutely unfinished condition. Nature has good intentions, of course, but as Aristotle once said, she cannot carry them out. When I look at a landscape I cannot help seeing all its defects. It is fortunate for us, however, that Nature is so imperfect, as otherwise we should have had no art at all. Art is our spirited protest, our gallant attempt to teach Nature her proper place. ["The Decay of Lying"]

As a further consequence, any organisation of space or time such as art attempts is basically seen as a means of bringing that dread-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ful space and terrifying time within human proportions, of "civilizing" them—a proposition that puts Blake at the very centre of artistic experience, with his comment that "Natural Objects always did and now do weaken, deaden and obliterate Imagination in Me."[8] In social terms, this becomes the suggestion that, in Wilde's words,

> the art that is frankly decorative is the art to live with. It is, of all our visible arts [at least], the one art that creates in us both mood and temperament. Mere colour, unspoiled by meaning and unallied with definite form, can speak to the soul in a thousand different ways. The harmony that resides in the delicate proportions of lines and masses becames mirrored in the mind. The repetitions of pattern give us rest. The marvels of design stir the imagination. In the mere loveliness of the materials employed there are latent elements of culture. Nor is this all. By its deliberate rejection of Nature as the ideal of beauty, as well as of the imitative method of the ordinary painter, decorative art not merely prepares the soul for the reception of true imaginative work, but develops in it that sense of form which is the basis of creative no less than of critical achievement. For the real artist is he who proceeds, not from feeling to form, but from form to thought and feeling. ["The Critic as Artist"]

Thus, such an art is not only anthropologically, but psychologically, primitive, insofar as the psyche is directed towards the creation of works of art. And further, such an art is, practically speaking, useless; which makes it psychologically and imaginatively invaluable. Its aim is merely to produce pleasure, and to destroy any artificial sense of imitation or any sophisticated ideal of sincerity, both of which are lethal to the true artistic temperament and the true artistic response. Insincerity thereby becomes, according to Wilde, a means by which we can multiply and consequently develop our personalities. As Lord Illingworth says in *A Woman of No Importance,* "taking sides is the beginning of sincerity, and earnestness follows afterwards, and the human being becomes a bore."

According to this scheme, then, the artist and his art have no obligations. Like Wallace Stevens' Supreme Fiction, such an art

[8] A marginal comment to Wordsworth's *Poems* made by Blake in 1826, with particular reference to the lines about the "Influence of Natural Objects/In calling forth and strengthening the Imagination in Boyhood and Early Youth." Blake continues, in this note: "Wordsworth must know that what he Writes Valuable is Not to be found in Nature." For Wilde, a similar relationship also existed between the critic and the work of art.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

is enclosed by three simple descriptions: it must be abstract, it must change, and it must give pleasure. As Wilde wrote to an uncomprehending reader of *The Picture of Dorian Gray,*

> Art is useless because its aim is simply to create a mood. It is not meant to instruct, or to influence action in any way. It is superbly sterile, and the note of its pleasure is sterility. If the contemplation of a work of art is followed by action of any kind, the work is either of a very second-rate order, or the spectator has failed to realise the complete artistic impression.
>
> A work of art is useless as a flower is useless. A flower blossoms for its own joy. We gain a moment of joy by looking at it. That is all that is to be said about our relations to flowers. Of course man may sell the flower, and so make it useful to him, but this has nothing to do with the flower. It is not part of its essence. It is accidental. It is a misuse.[9]

Thus, being properly affected by this superb sterility of the work of art, we in the audience do not shoot the piano player on the stage; and the dog in the *New Yorker* cartoon does not lift his leg against the painting of the tree. Further, the process of catharsis becomes, in Wilde's phrase, a "rite of initiation" into the mysteries of a particular artistic form—in this case tragedy—rather than a surrogate for killing one's wife like Othello, or sleeping with one's mother like Oedipus. The standards of this art are that it is useless, that it is its own evidence, and that it is consistent with itself and sufficient unto itself. It is distinguished from craft insofar as it identifies means and ends, and does not distinguish between them. In a review of Pater's *Appreciations, with an Essay on Style,* which he contributed to the *Speaker* (March 22, 1890), Wilde quotes a passage from Pater's essay on Wordsworth which contains, in Wilde's opinion, "a truth eminently suitable for our age":

> That the end of life is not action but contemplation—*being* as distinct from *doing*—a certain disposition of the mind: is, in some shape or other, the principle of all the higher morality. In poetry, in art, if you enter into their true spirit at all, you touch this principle in a measure; these, by their sterility, are a type of beholding for the mere joy of beholding. To treat life in the spirit of art is to make life a thing in which means and ends are identified: to encourage such treatment, the true moral significance of art and poetry.

Occasionally life produces its own work of art, such as Phipps, the butler in *An Ideal Husband,* who is described as "a mask with a

[9] *Letters,* p. 292.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

manner," and who is said to represent "the dominance of form." But generally, the only link between Art and Nature, except for incorrigible sentimentalists such as Wordsworth, is, according to Wilde, a "really well-made buttonhole."

I have described how Wilde recognised—with Worringer—that art moves in two directions, one of which satisfies an urge to abstract *from,* and the other of which satisfies an urge to identify *with,* the forces and energies which are usually called natural. The former direction generates a specific concern with form and style; the latter direction leads to an interest in content and subject, to a delight in the organic, rather than the organised, quality of form. This latter area is one in which aesthetic problems tend to arise in an acute manner, since it is the area where ethics and aesthetics converge. It is this predilection, so infuriating to philosophers, which Wilde used to fashion a second way in which he could approach those "truths in art whose contradictory is also true"—a way through subject primarily, rather than through style.

The subject, rather than the style, of the work of art then provides the delicious, indiscriminate, and organic vitality which the individual supposedly craves. In the terms established by Worringer's "urge to empathy," it is "in order to alienate oneself from individual being"; in Veblen's terms, which are also those of our own day, it is to involve or lose oneself in something or other, whether it be a movement or a movie. But it is neither style nor subject, abstraction nor empathy, egotism nor commitment, which is exclusively or separately important. For it is precisely the point about art—though Worringer did not recognize it—that it satisfies both the urge to abstraction and the urge to empathy, that it is both sterile and organic, both useless and used; just as it is the point about leisure—though Veblen did not recognise it—that it permits social prerogatives to be both rejected and accepted, both ignored and attended to, both squandered and hoarded, that it uniquely allows one both to have one's cake and eat it. And in all these cases, with respect to art and to leisure: if not both, then neither.

It is the genius of Wilde that he did recognize this slippery paradox, where "the contradictory is also true," and that he embodied it in all of his work. Perhaps a sense of this is best conveyed by the subtitles of the two parts of his essay on "The Critic

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

as Artist," the first of which was called "Some Remarks Upon the Importance of Doing Nothing"; and the second, "Some Remarks Upon the Importance of Discussing Everything." The first leads to the affirmation, in the first and last sentences of the Preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray,* that

> the artist is the creator of beautiful things. . . . We can forgive a man for making a useful thing as long as he does not admire it. The only excuse for making a useless thing is that one admires it intensely. All art is quite useless.

The second leads just as inevitably to the suggestion, in the same Preface, that

> the moral life of man forms part of the subject matter of the artist. . . . No artist is ever morbid. The artist can express everything. Thought and language are to the artist instruments of an art. Vice and virtue are to the artist materials for an art.

Thus, art inheres in the complementary and paradoxical priorities of style and subject, and provided the artist recognizes this, he is immune from the cavils of either the utilitarian or the moralist. In this respect, Wilde submits elsewhere that

> morbidity is, of course, a ridiculous word to apply to a work of art. For what is morbidity but a mood of emotion or a mode of thought that one cannot express? The public are all morbid, because the public can never find expression for anything. The artist is never morbid. He expresses everything. . . . To call an artist morbid because he deals with morbidity as his subject-matter is as silly as if one called Shakespeare mad because he wrote *King Lear.* ["The Soul of Man Under Socialism"]

Art therefore is a means—and the only means—by which thoughts and feelings and beliefs can find expression, without ever having to "pay the price" of that expression: it embodies the truth, and avoids the consequences. Such a view implies that art never expresses anything but itself; and further, that the subject of a work of art is first and foremost the artist's *awareness* of himself—his self-consciousness, just as the style of a work of art is the artist's *expression* of himself—his personality. Since an artist's awareness of himself is often much less precise or available than his personality, his art may become obscure. Wilde's reaction to Browning was typical of his treatment of obscurity in poetry, and of his sensitivity to the new literature:

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> There is something curiously interesting in the marked tendency of modern poetry to become obscure. Many critics, writing with their eyes fixed on the masterpieces of past literature, have ascribed this tendency to wilfulness and to affectation. Its origin is rather to be found in the complexity of the new problems, and in the fact that self-consciousness is not yet adequate to explain the contents of the Ego.[10]

This is not an apology for incompetence, though Wilde recognised that kind of obscurity also, and used to say that "to be intelligible is to be found out." Rather, it is another version of the extent to which style and subject become interdependent, and leads inevitably to the paradox that "only the great masters of style ever succeed in being obscure" ("Phrases and Philosophies for the Use of the Young"). And further, we have here an insight into the inexplicable appeal of all art, including the obscure, for we have an insight into

> the great truth that Art's first appeal is neither to the intellect nor to the emotions, but purely to the artistic temperament, and . . . this temperament, this "taste," . . . being unconsciously guided and made perfect by frequent contact with the best work, becomes in the end a form of right judgment. ["Pen, Pencil and Poison"]

Wilde's typical and genuine art thereby defines its own conditions irrespective of, and sometimes contrary to, those which apply in the real world. Not only does it "never express anything but itself," but also

> it has an independent life, just as Thought has, and develops purely on its own lines. . . . All bad art comes from returning to Life and Nature, and elevating them into ideals. Life and Nature may sometimes be used as part of Art's rough material, but before they are of any real service to art they must be translated into artistic conventions . . . Life imitates Art far more than Art imitates Life. This results not merely from Life's imitative instinct, but from the fact that the self-conscious aim of Life is to find expression, and that Art offers it certain beautiful forms through which it may realise that energy. ["The Decay of Lying"]

Such forms, being the forms of art and not the forms of life, exist in a discontinuous relationship with the energies of life which they embody. That is to say, the tears of the beloved do not dampen

[10] From Wilde's review of Caroline FitzGerald's *Venetia Victrix*, a volume of poetry dedicated to Browning, and showing obvious traces of his influence. In the passage quoted, Wilde is discussing Browning's work. (*Woman's World*, May 1889.)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the page of the poem, which may well be covered with words about stars, or vines, or organically grown vegetables, or whatever happens to be the conventional device at the time. Therefore, in extravagant terms, the emblem of the arts becomes not the Truth, but the Lie, and "Lying, or the telling of beautiful untrue things, the proper aim of Art." Extravagant terms, perhaps, and certainly made so by Wilde in his essay on "The Decay of Lying," but by no means an unusual claim for the arts by both its friends and its enemies. For just as "a Truth in art is that whose contradictory is also true," it is possibly more accurate than critics have yet realised to say that a truth *about* Art is that which can be used to approve or condemn imaginative expression in general. Accordingly, that the artist is a liar has been the claim both of enthusiasts like Coleridge, and of subversives like Bentham. One of the more modern enthusiasts is Pablo Picasso, whose first (and rare) statement of aesthetic principles, published in 1923 from an interview with Marius de Zayas, sounds very much like Wilde. "Art," suggested Picasso, "is a lie that makes us realize truth"; or, as Robert Browning said, "the histrionic truth is in the natural lie." Picasso went on to comment on those who speak of naturalism as being in opposition to modern painting. (Here, it might be useful to remember that Wilde always opposed Realism, and not Classicism, to the Romantic in art.)

> I would like to know [asks Picasso] if anyone has ever seen a natural work of art. Nature and art, being two different things, cannot be the same thing. Through art we express our conception of what nature is not. . . .
>
> From the point of view of art there are no concrete or abstract forms, but only forms which are more or less convincing lies. That those lies are necessary to our mental selves is beyond any doubt, as it is through them that we form our aesthetic view of life.[11]

It is this "aesthetic view of life"—discontinuous, as I have suggested, with any other (practical) view—which provides the touchstone for Wilde's eloquent and passionate writing, and which informs his attitude towards literally everything else.

Since art is "the telling of beautiful, untrue things," or a mode of lying, it follows that "truth-telling" is a "morbid and unhealthy

[11] "Picasso Speaks," *The Arts* (New York, May 1923), pp. 315-326; translated from the original interview in Spanish. The idea has been eloquently expressed by a wide variety of writers, from Robert Browning to Roland Barthes.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

faculty." Truth has its place, but only as a matter of style, not subject. The complementary paradox regarding style is simply that "the only beautiful things are the things that do not concern us" ("The Decay of Lying"). Things that concern us have their place, of course, but only as a matter of subject, not style.

There is, naturally, a catch, for the lie, like the "beauty" of the work of art, must be for its own sake alone, otherwise it gets confused with life, and with ethics.

> The only form of lying that is absolutely beyond reproach is lying for its own sake, and the highest development of this is, as we have already pointed out, Lying in Art. Just as those who do not love Plato more than Truth cannot pass beyond the threshold of the Academe, so those who do not love Beauty more than Truth never know the inmost shrine of Art. ["The Decay of Lying"]

And the surest way of testing, as Wilde knew well, is by the use of irony and humour, which never fail to expose the incompetent, and the unfaithful.

When Wilde got sentimental, he could write dramatically to Robert Ross how

> on the other side of the prison-wall there are some poor black soot-besmirched trees that are just breaking out into buds of an almost shrill green. I know quite well what they are going through. They are finding expression. . . .[12]

But in his clearer moments, Wilde knew of the artistic disaster that inevitably results when the poor black soot-besmirched people of the world try to find expression directly in art, without converting their passion into the counterfeit currency of art—his own *Ballad of Reading Gaol* is, as he recognized, a schizophrenic poem for this very reason. (And here, in a sense, the values of art are ignored, even as humane values were ignored during Wilde's trial.) For the truths which art has to offer are not agonised and honest; they are essentially unserious, and insincere—and, as a matter of course, "the true critic is unfair, insincere, and not rational" ("The Critic as Artist"). The brutish seriousness of action and sincerity is transcended by the genial spirit of the artist; Friedrich Schiller's theory of play is the application of this idea to the arts. Thereby, art is recognized as a critique of the bondage imposed by serious

[12] *Letters*, p. 514. Sometimes included in *De Profundis*, though not actually a part of the letter to Douglas.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

endeavours of any kind, and the one sure means of keeping in touch with what is humane and individual. The aim of art is then said to be "emotion for the sake of emotion," while the aim of life and society is emotion for the sake of action. Thus, on one level, Tom Sawyer and his friends can enjoy white-washing the fence, since they are not constrained by the obligation to do it; and, on another level—the imaginative level of the arts—we can enjoy watching the death of Romeo and Juliet, since we are not constrained by the obligations of the actual, but on the contrary are freed by the artistic form, the perfect inconsequence of which delights us.

Thus, "art for art's sake" becomes a paradigm for any activity which is not constrained by conditions external to itself—such an activity, for example, as the creation of a work of art or a way of life that is not determined by considerations of morality or popular utility. In sociological discourse, the result is usually called a leisure activity, or a luxury. Its character was first defined for this century by Veblen, along the lines that we have described. But Veblen's analysis was inevitably biassed, and he concentrated his attention on that aspect of leisure which does not benefit human needs (imaginative or practical), and which does not contribute to human happiness, but rather is time, effort, or money squandered. Indeed, for Veblen such activity embodies in an abstract form—that of "conspicuous" rather than necessary consumption—the reaction which leisure implies to utilitarian ethics and demands. In a very real sense, which the purveyors of luxury do not fail to recognize, this aspect of leisure has no "content," but is almost exclusively a matter of style, whether cultural or personal, or, most likely, both.

The other aspect of leisure, which Veblen would rather have ignored, consists of the affirmation of something other than the utility principle, and the positive rejection of its sway, through an involvement in activities which defy utilitarian prerogatives—activities varying from an identification with social "escapes" of one order or another (including those implicit in a work of art), to a life of ease (or what its devotees generally call freedom): in the middle there stands, ironically, radical social or political reform, very much a luxury in Veblen's day (a fact which we tend to forget). This aspect, being something other than a *simple* rejec-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tion—being, in a sense, positive rather than negative—he vaguely thought *did* benefit human needs, and contributed to something which he called—equally vaguely—the "fulness of life." Such activities, rather than inhering in style, are assertions of an implicit organic vitality, of emotional or intellectual feelings and aspirations, and have a very definite "content" or "subject," which is why Veblen's shopworn metaphor of "filling up" one's life with them is so apt.

But Veblen had a very dull and rusty axe to grind, and for expediency he surreptitiously separated the two aspects, refusing to recognise their interdependence; and tried to root out the first as a social evil, while saving the second out of what now seems like an absent-minded and generous (and for his time unusual) recognition of the value of something other than work. It was the contribution of the "aesthetes" of the Nineties, bolstered by the dignified practical ambitions of Ruskin and Morris, to assert that the two aspects are inseparable, that leisure is composed both of evasion and indulgence, both of apathy and rebellion. They claimed not only that leisure has such a composite nature, but that it is intimately related both to work and to art through the mediation of craft. It was left to the disciples of Ruskin and Morris, the European artists and craftsmen who created the German Bauhaus, to provide a concrete—sometimes all too concrete—expression of this circularity, whereby the humane values of life are protected by a context in which creative work and leisure are inextricably involved, to merge at some millennium into craft and art, and eventually into one. But this view, while hopeful, does not fully take into account the ironies and the conflicts without which both art and leisure cease, in Wilde's more personal and profound terms, to exist.

Those who were philosophically inclined, and with a Hegelian bent, such as Wilde, realized that although the happiness which is a part both of the style and of the content of leisure consists in avoiding the pernicious consequences of social and moral obligation, yet this same happiness exists only in a form which contains the general condition of those same pernicious consequences, in the form of their negative. That is, the state of happiness which leisure provides has as a necessary and sufficient condition for its existence that one shall be conscious of that which is being

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

avoided, that one shall, for example, consume conspicuously, remembering as well as forgetting that it is wasteful—a condition which is sometimes used to create what European sociologists call a "dialectic of luxury." All of which means, in short, that "you've got to be hot to be cool"; and it is along such a paradox that ethics and aesthetics most often collide, to the unconcealed amusement of the enemies of leisure and of art. The special (and urgent) reference to the unique values of art which this rather disconcerting consideration implies was most extensively examined by Wilde, with his talk of truth and lying, of art and nature (or life); and by the Cubist painters, with their insistence on the artistic logic of the plastic surface itself (which they liked to call a "more real reality"), at the same time as they included imitative and illusionistic versions of reality within their paintings, eventually going so far as to paste on the most vulgar of all realities, the newspaper clipping.

But Wilde went much further. He advocated the cultivation of idleness, in a way that confounded his critics. They were prepared for him to be Rasselas, for they could dismiss that as an adolescent phase, an imaginative kindergarten. But they were by no means prepared for him to suggest that this idleness, this cultivation of the luxurious and the beautiful for their own sake alone, must be an inseparable part of the cultivation of a better society, and even of better means of production. The dreamers, as far as Wilde was concerned, were of no use at all if they insisted on dreaming on the mountain top. They must do their dreaming in the market place, for it is there that they are most irritating, and there that the contagion can spread. And dreaming has, of course, always been (to the authorities) as much a social disaster as the plague. Particularly so in the England of Wilde's day, a country populated by practical people, who energetically followed Carlyle down the path of hard and diligent toil, and who fondly remembered that Edmund Burke had classed industrial stinks and stenches with the sublime. It was also, of course, an England at war with the Zulus abroad, and with sodomy at home. To this England, and to the continent nearby, Wilde suggested, with no humility at all, that "dulness is the coming of age of seriousness," that "industry [by this he meant diligence] is the root of all ugliness," and that "the first duty in life is to be as artificial as possible. What the second

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

duty is, no one has as yet discovered" ("Phrases and Philosophies for the Use of the Young"). And the most available source of this artificiality, this world of created forms, is art. Wilde saw clearly that the arts protect man's emotions and his ideas—his two most dangerous and most precious assets—from contamination by practical pursuits, and perhaps from contamination by the new gospel that was to be propounded by men like Oswald Spengler, who wrote in his introduction to the *Decline of the West:*

> If the influence of this book leads men of the new generation to turn from poetry to technology, from painting to the merchant marine, from epistemology to politics, they are doing what I desire. One could wish nothing better for them.

And so we come to a sense of Wilde's "truth of art." "What is truth?" Answered Wilde,

> In matters of religion, it is simply the opinion that has survived. In matters of science, it is the ultimate sensation. In matters of art, it is one's last mood. ["The Critic as Artist"]

This mood, composed as it is of emotions and ideas—or, we might say, of feelings and principles—is wonderfully fragile. It is endangered, as we have seen, by an unhealthy concern for the practical. How this is so is most ingeniously described by Wilde; and, in broader terms, by the German critic and philosopher Theodor W. Adorno, for whom a fundamentally similar view—a view of the arts, and an aesthetic—is central to urgent twentieth-century problems of methodology, sociology, politics, and aesthetics.

Unfortunately best known in the English-speaking world for his co-authorship of the collection of studies published in 1950 under the title *The Authoritarian Personality,* Adorno is almost certainly the most influential and the most formidable of the generation of critics of western society and culture to come to prominence since the war. He is also by far the most difficult. He was born in 1903 in Frankfurt; his musical studies in Vienna and his cultural and intellectual interests threw him into association with men as various as Arnold Schönberg, Paul Tillich, and Georg Lukács. After some years in exile in England and America, he returned to Germany in the late 1940's (leaving his friend Herbert Marcuse behind—far behind), and eventually succeeded Max Horkheimer as director of the Institute for Social Research in the Goethe Uni-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

versity in Frankfurt, a post he occupied until his death in 1969. His roots are established fairly solidly in the work of Freud, Marx, and to some extent Max Weber, but Adorno did what his teacher and associate Walter Benjamin conveniently and assiduously avoided: he committed himself to the tradition of Hegelian dialectic, and in doing so committed himself to a critical method which is as essentially ironic and evasive as its conclusions are paradoxical. From his work on Kierkegaard, Hegel, and Husserl, through his voluminous essays on classical and modern literature, to his masterful studies of musical form and aesthetics, his work is informed by a methodology which is called Marxist Hegelian by the true believers, and by those who have read neither Marx nor Hegel; and which is dismissed as incomprehensible aestheticism by his opponents, and by those who have not read Adorno.[13]

Adorno's subject was seemingly different from Wilde's, for his concern was not with utility and leisure, or work and play, but with the political demands of social "practice" and "theory." But his insight was identical, for both saw not only that each dialectial opposite defines the other, but also that their values and prerogatives and mutual interdependence are uniquely enshrined and embodied in, and protected by, the relationship between art and life (or, for an earlier age, between art and nature).

Adorno suggested that the difference between theory and practice—or, in the extreme terms suggested by Wilde, between the dreamer and the man of action—can be traced back to the earliest split between mental and physical labour, in all likelihood back to prehistory. Practice, or the practical, is therefore merely a so-

[13] Adorno's publications include *Kierkegaard, Konstruktion des Aesthetischen* (1933); *Dialektik der Aufklärung: Philosophische Fragmente* (with Max Horkheimer) (1947); *Philosophie der neuen Musik* (1949); *Minima Moralia* (1951); *Versuch über Wagner* (1952); *Prismen: Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft* (1955); *Noten zur Literatur* (3 vols.: 1958, 1961, 1965); *Eingriffe: Neun kritische Modelle* (1963); *Klangfiguren: Musikalische Schriften I* (1959); *Quasi una fantasia: Musikalische Schriften II* (1963); *Einleitung in die Musiksoziologie* (1962); *Negative Dialektik* (1966); *Ohne Leitbild: Parva Aesthetica* (1967); *Stichworte: Kritische Modelle II* (1969: posthumous collection of essays). Unfortunately, very little of Adorno's work is available in English. Apart from his contributions to *The Authoritarian Personality*, and several articles originally written in English (during his stay in the United States), only *Prisms* (London, 1967) has appeared in translation. Three articles in the *Times Literary Supplement* have discussed Adorno's work: "Intelligence and Servitude" (16 February, 1962); "Theodor W. Adorno" (28 September, 1967); "Dialectical Methodology" (12 March, 1970). A useful critical volume in German is the collection of essays entitled "*Über Theodor W. Adorno* (1968: in the "edition suhrkamp" series).

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

phisticated name for labour, which comes about when man decides not only to reproduce life, but to maintain the conditions of life, which he initially does in order to survive, and then because in a hazy way he assumes he should be comfortable: if he is a poet, he has a vision of a garden. But the creation of this state involves work, which is essentially unpleasant, so that man reaches a crisis, and has in effect to act contrary to the "pleasure principle" in order to preserve himself in the pleasurable manner to which he thinks he ought to be accustomed. Even though Adorno tried to establish the usual nineteenth-century mediation between work and play in craft, he was forced to concede that in terms of his analysis, this crisis marks the beginning (at least in anthropological terms) of the dissociation between theory and practice, or between the dreamer and the man of action. Practice is in this respect neither initially nor ultimately much more than the reflection of need, real or imagined; while theory attempts to abolish this need completely, all too often simply by changing its methodology (form) or its subject (content), and thereby changing the practice in which the need is reflected. But this just modifies, rather than eliminates, the need, and the point on which Adorno rather disconcertingly insists is that any (theoretically recognised) discrepancy between desire and satisfaction both requires and yet *inevitably* deforms and negates practice, especially when such practice is itself most anxious and most energetic to abolish need, by social or political action. (In terms of art, it is Blake insisting that "Natural Objects always did and now do weaken deaden and obliterate Imagination in Me.") Adorno comes by such analysis not to the cynical pessimism of so many of his colleagues, but to a different yet consonant version of Chuang Tzŭ's "creed of Inaction." At the same time, he maintains Wilde's insight, on the other side of the coin, that "it is not so easy to be unpractical as the ignorant Philistine imagines" ("The Critic as Artist").

The only way out of this dilemma, according to Adorno, is to recognize that the prerogatives and sanctities (and the dialectic—Adorno could not forget that trump) of art provide a model for a relationship between theory and practice which does not violate the values and demands of either. Thus, art becomes the "critique" both of "practice as unfreedom" and of "theory as sterility" (or, in Wilde's terms, of the earnest and the useless), with the ad-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ditional irony, which Adorno never shirked, that the adjectives are all too likely to change reference: that practice may become sterile, and the demands of theory introduce an "unfreedom." But the value and the importance of art remains inviolate and constant nevertheless. And it is important not only that art *is* such a critique, but that it is such a critique in ways determined by its contrary impulses, such as those which Wilde established between form and content, between style and subject, between truth and falsehood, and between the real and the imaginative. This, for Adorno as for Wilde, is the beginning of the truth of art.

Adorno's subject leads him to suggest further, in terms which parody those of Veblen, that it is only by a maximum *consumption* of artistic values that man can both disengage (or alienate) himself from the burden of necessity (Worringer's "urge to abstraction"),[14] and at the same time identify with the sources of life so dear to the Romantics (Worringer's "urge to empathy"). Quite naturally, this sort of alienation, which is a kind of self-preservation, often obtains sociologically in form, or, in the most mundane sense, in style; while this identification tends to be accomplished through an involvement in something which has a content, or a subject (however crass, futile, or popular it may appear to the unsympathetic), or which is an "issue," in which the individual loses himself even as in an organic sense he fulfils himself.

Adorno is not through, however, and the ironies become as unpalatable as they often are in Wilde. For art, and the luxuries of play and theory, while indispensable for the preservation (and essential exercise) of these humane priorities, cannot be explicitly *justified* without perverting the very values and prerogatives which they uniquely embody, and for which they are revered. Indeed, they can only be defined, much less justified, in terms of the contrary impulses and intentions which we have discussed, or by means of the kind of paradoxical statement so central to the writing of Wilde. With a similar sense of paradox, Adorno describes, on the one hand, the nineteenth- and twentieth-century romantics

[14] The German language is fortunate in having two words for "alienation": "*Entfremdung*," or the bad kind; and "*Verfremdung*," or the good. The latter is the term Brecht applied to his "distancing" effect; it is synonymous with Worringer's "*abstraktion*," and with Adorno's concept of "disengagement," or "alienation." Writers in English seem to take little care with a distinction which is quite obviously crucial.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

who look at Nietzsche's Zarathustra, delighting in the play of his own mind, and cry: "It is an *unjust privilege, irrelevant* to the condition of the masses." (Such was the theme of the early Karl Marx.) On the other hand, Adorno turns to those with a sense of classical traditions in thought, including the later Marx, who say: "*Justice* and *morality* are products of a particular order of things, and the realm of art and luxury does not admit either. They are simply *irrelevant,* like poverty to a king." Having turned in these two directions, Adorno, like Wilde, makes a little bow and walks off stage. That this bow becomes grotesque in the later work of both writers is only a testimony to the terrible irony inherent in all of this, an irony which insists that the two modes of irrelevance (or perverse justification) are inseparable, at least in western culture.

And so an agonised Adorno, full of passionate social concern, continued to write on the Importance of Doing Nothing, and had rotten eggs thrown at his funeral by the irate activists of the so-called New Left, who were his former students. Had Wilde died in England, I am sure he would have had something of the same privilege, though superficially not for quite the same reasons.

In his letters *On the Aesthetic Education of Man,* Friedrich Schiller suggested that

> man can be at odds with himself in two ways: either as savage, when feeling predominates over principle; or as barbarian, when principle destroys feeling. The savage despises Civilisation, and acknowledges Nature as his sovereign mistress. The barbarian derides and dishonours Nature, but, more contemptible than the savage, as often as not continues to be the slave of his slave.[15]

In terms of Wilde's familiar distinctions, the savage becomes the artist who "follows Nature," his sovereign mistress; and the barbarian is the artist who fashions his work for the public, rather than for himself—who takes care to provide a moral, or incite to action, and thereby continues to be the slave of his slave. The critic then is the guardian of Schiller's "man of culture," and genuine art is a critique of the kind of denial of freedom that is introduced by *either* the barbarian or the savage. Either of these

[15] *On the Aesthetic Education of Man,* edited and translated by E. M. Wilkinson and L. A. Willoughby (Oxford, 1967), p. 21 (Fourth Letter, 6). See also pp. 89-91 (Thirteenth Letter, 3-5). For the account of Schiller's theory of play, mentioned above, see the Fifteenth, Twenty-Third, and Twenty-Seventh Letters.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

aberrations are, in turn, perverse versions of the two aspects of leisure, or of social concern, or of art, that we identified earlier. The savage denies the priorities of style, while the barbarian perverts his subject; the savage ignores theory (since for him "feeling predominates over principle"), while the barbarian corrupts practice ("principle destroys feeling"); the savage is hopelessly ill-disciplined, the barbarian absurdly earnest. Genuine art, and its genuine critics, transcend these aberrations on a precarious tightrope.

The final irony is, perhaps, that since the truth of art begins in the recognition of its opposite, of that which would destroy it, and since art exists as the critique not just of the barbarian and the savage, but in a broader scheme of the serious, the sincere, the moral, and the reasonable, as well as of the vacuous, the sterile, the simulated, and the sentimental, it is therefore as important to know what it is to be earnest, as to know what it is to do nothing.

Recently back from India, Rudyard Kipling wrote of his new fellow-artists:

> But I consort with long-haired things
> In velvet collar-rolls,
> Who talk about the Aims of Art,
> And "theories" and "goals,"
> And moo, and coo with womenfolk
> About their blessed souls.[16]

Kipling was not very enthusiastic about Wilde. At the other extreme, and I think much nearer the truth, is a comment by the Argentinian writer and critic Jorge Luis Borges:

> Reading and rereading Wilde through the years, I notice something that his panegyrists do not seem to have even suspected. . . If I am not mistaken, he was much more than an Irish Moréas; he was a man of the eighteenth century who sometimes condescended to play the game of symbolism. Like Gibbon, like Johnson, like Voltaire, he was an ingenious man who was also right.[17]

[16] First printed in *The Civil and Military Gazette* of Lahore on December 23, 1889. Reprinted in *Turnovers*, Vol. VIII. Collected in *Abaft the Funnel*, 1909.

[17] "About Oscar Wilde," *Other Inquisitions 1937-1952*, trans. Ruth L. C. Simms (Austin, 1964), pp. 80-1.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

WILLIAM STAFFORD

In the White Sky

Many things in the world have
already happened. You can
go back and tell about them.
They are part of what we
own as we speed along
through the white sky.

But many things in the world
haven't yet happened. You help
them by thinking and writing and acting.
Where they begin, you greet them
or stop them. You come along
and sustain the new things.

Once, in the white sky there was
a beginning, and I happened to notice
and almost glimpsed what to do.
But now I have come far
to here, and it is away back there.
Some days, I think about it.

Sleeping on the Sisters Land

Rain touches your face just at daylight.
No sky in the west: you turn your head
and the world revolves into gray so bright
that a glance like love falls deep
toward the dreams that you left.

What lands are these, forever near?
They are great gray islands that come for us,
where the new dreams are, far as the sky
and the light, and sudden as rain
that touches your face.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Friend

For anyone, for anyone,
the years are a sufficient storm:
over horizons in channels of wind
they blow, steady and long.

When I was young, when I was young,
I ran that storm—I walk it now.
And those who then companioned me,
save one, are gone.

They are nothing. They are nothing.
Forget them. What the sky can hold,
it holds, by day by day. But they—
they're lost, even on my inner sky.

From human loss, from gravel, from stone,
after years, one holds what one can.
I look out—that boy: undeterred,
he runs on through the withering world.

Weeds

What's down in the earth
comes forth in cold water,
in mist at night, in muttering
volcanoes that ring oceans
moving strangely at times.

And in autumn all the fields
witness forth: power there
where roots find it, rooms
delved silently and left
for the dark to have.

Up and down all highways
weed flags proclaim,
"Great is Earth our home!"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

as we slip our hand
into winter's again.

Great is Earth our home.
Great is the sky.
And great are weeds in the fields.
We celebrate earth and air
as we sing in the wind.

The Escape

Now as we cross this white page together
people begin to notice us, and we
cut back and pretend indifference,
but all the time we pick up and lay
down our tracks cunningly, farther
and farther down the page. If we zig-
zagged or jumped a few times we could
make it, but even better would be
to take hands and perform a dance, our eyes
locked onto understanding, while our shadows
tell us which way to go. Those others
glare on our trail; they know what
is happening, and they certainly do not
approve. Remember, we are each other's: do not
look away. Every life is like this,
carried on while some inane plot
tries to intrude. How lucky we were
to find each other and make our escape
down the page and on out like this over the edge.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

CHARLES TOMLINSON

Rower

A plotless tale: the passing hours
Bring in a day that's nebulous. Glazes of moist pearl
Mute back the full blaze of a sea,
Drifting continually where a slack tide
Has released the waters. Shallows
Spread their transparency, letting through
A pale-brown map of sandbanks
Barely submerged, where a gull might wade
Thin legs still visible above its blurred reflection.
It seems nothing will occur here until
The tide returns, ferrying the shore its freshness,
Beating and breaking only to remake itself
The instant the advancing line goes under.
And nothing does. Except for the inching transformations
Of a forenoon all melting redundancies
Just beyond eyeshot: the grey veils
Drink-in a little more hidden sunlight,
Shadows harden, pale. But then
Out into the bay, towards deeper water,
Sidles the rower, gaining speed
As he reaches it. Already his world
Is sliding by him. Backwards
He enters it, eyes searching the past
Before them: that shape that crowns the cliff,
A sole, white plane, draws tight his gaze—
A house, bereft so it seems of time
By its place of vantage, high
Over cleft and crack. When, as momentarily,
He steals a glance from it to fling
Across his travelling shoulder, his eyes
Soon settle once more along that line
Tilted towards the shoremark. And though the ripple
Is beneath him now—the pull and beat
Unfelt when further in—he cuts athwart it

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Making his way, to the liquid counterpulse
Of blades that draw him outwards to complete
The bay's half-circle with his own. Muscle
And bone work to that consummation of the will
Where satisfaction gathers to surfeit, strain
To ease. Pleased by his exertions, he abandons them
Riding against rested oars, subdued
For the moment to that want of purpose
In sky and water, before he shoots
Feathering once more baywards, his face
To the direction the tide will take when
Out of the coherent chaos of a morning that refuses
To declare itself, it comes plunging in
Expunging the track of his geometries.

Le Rendez-vous des Paysages

The promenade, the plage, the paysage
all met somewhere
in the reflection of a reflection
in midair: cars, unheard,
were running on water: jetplanes
lay on their backs
like sunbathers
in a submarine graveyard
about to resurrect into the fronds
of ghost-palms boasting
"We exist,"
to the sea's uncertain mirrors
to the reversed clocktowers that had lost
all feeling for time
suspended
among the overlapping vistas
of promenade, plage, paysage.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

La Promenade de Protée

Changing, he walks the changing avenue:
this blue and purple are the blue
and purple of autumn underwater:
they are changing to green and he
is changing to an undulated statue
in this sea-floor park
and does not know
if the iced green will undo him
or which are real
among the recollections that cling
to him and seem to know him:
and hears overhead the shudder of departing keels.

Hawks

Hawks hovering, calling to each other
  Across the air, seem swung
Too high on the risen wind
  For the earth-clung contact of our world:
And yet we share with them that sense
  The season is bringing in, of all
The lengthening light is promising to exact
  From the obduracy of March. The pair
After their kind, are lovers and their cries
  Such as lovers alone exchange, and we
Though we cannot tell what it is they say,
  Caught up into their calling, are in their sway,
And ride where we cannot climb the steep
  And altering air, breathing the sweetness
Of our own excess, till we are kinned
  By space we never thought to enter
On capable wings to such reaches of desire.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

R. G. VLIET

The Third Window

NOW HERE'S THIS CREEK AGAIN—right across their way. He gave the horse its head and it started down the gully slope, shoes clinking, scraping against the rock. They weren't never going to get there. They. The saddle creaked. Creek. Creaked. He tried to dodge the shinnery oak, but a dead branch caught his slicker. It pulled at his slicker. Never. He ought to back the damned horse up; he ought to have the sense to back the horse up. Upwards. Backwards. Back it up. Get there. *Streeek.* The slicker ripped, harsh drypaper tear—ripped his eyelids apart. Dark. That's a rooster crowing in the dark, wrangling it up through the crik in its neck, ripping the satin dark. Not the real morning yet. His eyeballs felt hard and cold and dry as a cadaver's, marbly in the blind dark, his body tense as a cadaver, strained, strict, the cold strings tight all through, and morning a round cold stone stuck in his gut. The rooster crowed again, scraping it from its craw. And another and another rooster, further and further, all over town like spurts of light, struck lucifers. Somebody was turning a rackety coffee mill downstairs. Yesterday. Mist. Everything wet, heavy enough to drip from trees. Wrapped in his slicker like the windings of a ghost, riding hard through the spring wet, swocking wet reins at the horse's rump, wet whang strings and saddle wallet slapping its flanks. Who's that grinding coffee downstairs? To Cherokee. Yes. Pushing through the watery air, his hearing clogged, his breathing choked and thick like he was under water. He could've used a pair of gills. Snagged his slicker on an all of a sudden branch, crossing that creek bed. *Oh yes!*—This damned bed sags; the cords need tightening.

He was sunk in the feather tick like a thumb in puffed up biscuit dough, between two sheets, a goose hair bolster under his head. He listened. A three dollar clock ticking in the dark. Smell of glaze on new calico, rose water, tar soap, lamp oil, lavender; it's close as a parlor in here. Vanilla and warm skin. —There she is on the far side of the bed, breathing. Even. Easy. Through

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

an open mouth. So she finally let up. After all that fuss. Clabe slid his hand across the feather tick, between the two sheets of domestic: Johnnie Lee, warm as biscuits, fat as mud. She turned from his touch, moaning in her sleep. Still in her medicated scarlets. Jesus H. Christ.

Old deaf Granny Chant is grinding coffee downstairs. Maybe she's fixin' me breakfast. Sit up and take some fry, Son. Yes'm. Take some butter. Did you en-joy my Johnnie Lee?

The rooster struck it up again, rough as a rasp, from the splotched top branch of its fig tree down in the dooryard. And another off yonder atop an old sawbuck, and another stretching its flesh upwards from a grip on a hoe handle, and on a snapped over cornstalk in last year's garden patch, and on a wagon tongue and a picket fence and the town watering trough, *chark-o-cherokee,* the whole kit and kaboodle clearing the way, working like hell to crack the nightshell apart, let loose that yeller yolk right here in Cherokee. Already the window was a different, gun blue, dark . . .

Back from Croghan about an hour to dark. That bastard Harney always hulls a short ration; two bits to Sam to bed Beel down proper, see he gets a good feed. Washed in the basin in the bunkroom over the wagon yard. Plenty of Hoyt's Cologne. A clean hickory shirt and his go to meetin' suit. Brass toed boots. Wet his hair with water to flatten out the curls, parted it dead center from the front straight back down to the nape of his neck. Pretty fancy. Oysters and whiskey at the Buckhorn Saloon: cove oysters up from the Gulf, and a handful of crackers, a bottle of pepper sauce, nickel's worth of cheese. It makes a Christmas dinner in July.

And there was Johnnie Lee across the aisle amongst the women, the world is a trouble and a sorrow the only bright light is Jesus, singing hard, sometimes looking at him. And then her head bowed down to where she could talk to him out of the corner of her eye. Consider, the preacher said, the path of righteousness. She'd darkened her eyebrows with a burnt match, dabbed vanilla behind her ears. It was all he could smell on the way home from church: vanilla and warm skin. In her lace trimmed brilliantine Sunday dress, narrow shoulders, girl waist, lots of hip in a basket of bustle: bread of heaven. The preacher slung his arms around like he was fighting bees instead of sin. Come up

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and be saved, come up and be saved. Next thing Clabe knew, he was down on his prayer bones at the front bench, all choked on his sins like on a gulletful of sweet potatoes, a passel of women crying and singing along behind, shouting across to the menfolk to change their ways, get up there with him.

Amen. Amen. Rolled his sins like a dung beetle up to God. His pride, his laziness, his taking the Lord God's name in vain, his drinking, his gambling (he could smell the vanilla clear up here), his general disrespect of things religious. I thank you, you good people, and Preacher Threadgill, that brung me to see my sinful ways. These past three days he'd been sweating it out, thinking on last Wednesday's sermon—The Devil's Tally—and now he seen his way clear, clear to be saved. Scratch his name, O Lord, tear out that page, inscribe it anew in the *Lord's* tallybook.

To hell with the Lord God Almighty, fetch him down here, let him walk the brush, let him see what it's like. All this God stuff, all this sweet Jesus stuff, all them *words,* for christsake. You can sing your psalms across a dead horse; you can heap up your prayers until you got a mountain pile and never get out of this hell. Here, right here at the bottom of the night, kicked out on his ass, his senses busted, flat on his back on a sagging bed. Even his bones feel crooked. And those church bastards mean to hang a bible to his neck, make him lug around *that* bucket of ashes. No, hell no, that don't make it all right, that don't fit the pieces back together: this whole damned world knocked apart like a busted bale.

I can't breathe in this place; it's too weathertight.

Now the window was taking shape, oyster gray, square as a cracker. One star out there.

That fishlike hush just before dawn. The clock ticked away in broken chunks.

Pretty soon the lamplight drained out of the kitchen and crossed the parlor and settled for a spell in the downstairs sleeping room. The hired mare cropped wet winter grass next the fence. The day mist had flattened down close to the ground, filling the sinks and hollows with quicksilver that kept shifting and spreading into different shapes above the ground. It was awful quiet, except for the mare's chomping. The light went out in the sleeping room. A lamp was still burning in the room up-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

stairs. Claiborne stepped down from the buggy, caught the mare by the curb strap under her chin, and led her into the lot across the road. He tied her to a tree. Then he walked back across the road and opened the gate and closed it careful behind him and pulled off his boots and stuck them in a gooseberry bush. He hadn't any socks. The swept yard felt good to his feet, wet and cool. He picked his way across a garden patch, past the fig tree and a peach tree loaded down with old horseshoes, and started climbing up the outside staircase. There was moonlight enough to see by. A three quarters moon.

Johnnie Lee opened the door a crack, on its wooden hinges. All Clabe could see was a strip of her face. She'd blown out the lamp inside.

"Claiborne?" she said. "What on earth!"

"You said you was going to lend me your prayer book, Johnnie Lee."

"Well I didn't mean *tonight,* for goodness sakes," she said. She giggled. Claiborne put his hand on the door frame, leaned down to her. "I figured to start right in studyin'," he said, "while the iron's hot."

"Shhh. Don't talk so loud. Is Grandma sleepin'?"

"There ain't no light downstairs."

"Well," Johnnie Lee whispered. She had her nose and mouth pressed to the crack between the door frame and the door. "Don't talk so loud." It was a pretty nose and mouth. Claiborne stuck his forehead into the angle of the frame and the door, close to her nose and mouth.

Claiborne whispered. "I sure have missed you," he said.

"I can't say as you've showed it, the last three days," she said. "You ain't been keepin' *me* much company."

"I been awful busy," he said.

"So busy you can't keep a little company with me?"

"I'm keepin' company right now, Johnnie Lee. You're awful purty."

"Ummm," she said. He tried to kiss her. She slid down to the floor, on the other side of the crack. He slid down too, right along with.

She said, "You didn't hardly say a word to me, on the way back from church tonight. What'd you hire a rig for, I want to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

know, if we wasn't going to talk and visit and such?"

"I reckon I was all het up from bein' saved," he said.

"Awful religious," she said.

The three quarters moon shone down. His feet were getting cold. They pressed their faces to the crack, closer and closer, drinking in the breathy heat from each other.

"Did you really miss me?" she said.

"Ever' minute."

Their mouths touched. She pulled back.

Claiborne reached his hand in through the door crack. He touched her face. This time she didn't pull back. He touched her hair and her face, cheek and nose and ear, and the streaked hair still piled up. It loosened her hair some. Johnnie Lee kind of leaned her face into his hand, turned her head amongst the movings of his hand. The motions fitted.

He said, "You sure are sweet, Johnnie Lee."

She said, "You are too, Claiborne."

He pushed at the door a mite. "You better go now," she said.

"Aw Johnnie Lee, show a little Christian charity. Leastways come set on the steps a spell with me. That's the softest hair."

He ran his fingers across her forehead, under the frill of hair, and into the slight smooth dip at her temple, and into her ear with all its china turnings, and back of her ear, yes she liked that, and through the warm nesty hair behind (he could feel the lace of the high tight collar scraping his wrist), and gentle across her closed eyes, and aside her nose and its small tip, and gentle down the rounding of her cheek, and awful gentle across her soft as ripe plums lips. She kissed his fingers, made upward pushes with her nose and mouth into his palm, like a wet calf feeding.

"All right," she said.

There was some fuss and fixing up inside. Then she came out onto the landing. She was still in her Sunday finery. Her shiny brilliantine dress threw back the moonlight like the dark silvering at the back of a mirror. Even her chestnut hair had some of that mirror silverishness. The moonlight whitened her face. She had the prettiest face, chalk white now. Matchblacked eyebrows and wet bright lips; the bone shadow hid her eyes. Claiborne started toward her. Johnnie Lee laughed, stepped back against the house. "No," she said, "let's look at the moon." She sat down

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

at the top of the steps. The stiff brilliantine rustled when she sat, and piled up into a conglomeration of yardgoods around her. Claiborne sat down next her, close as he could get. She said, "It looks cold up there." The moon was a cold stone flung into the middle of the black. Clabe got an arm around her. They sat there admiring God's handiwork, the firmament and such. Pretty soon Claiborne was admiring more of God's handiwork: up and down her back, around her waist, on the nubbin of her hip. She was backbone all the way around, but he found the soft places. Thing is, she let him do it. A little at first and then a whole lot more. It was a muss of yardgoods and kisses and catch. They tossed it back and forth like a Christmas orange.

Johnnie Lee pulled her mouth loose. She was breathing hard. "Oh Claiborne, stop it, I got to quit," she said.

"All right, Johnnie Lee," he said. "I sure don't want to bother you."

She stood up, pushing back her hair and straightening her dress. She stared at him. It was a wild stare. Of a sudden she laughed. "You got the longest boniest feet," she said. Next thing he knew, she was in the house.

He was right in after her. It was so dark inside you couldn't find your nose with both hands. He wasn't looking for his nose, though.

"Claiborne Sanderlin, you get out of here."

"That night air's bad for my health, Johnnie Lee."

"Please, darling, please."

"My feet are cold," he said.

She giggled. He caught her over by the bedpost. "Oh Claiborne," she said. Their teeth clicked when they hit. There was some fierce bussing and hugging and grapevine twisting. They sank down to the floor.

She got back her breath. "Quit," she said. "*Quit.* Grandma's right underneath."

"It'll do her good," he said.

"I've changed my notion," Johnnie Lee said.

Clabe kissed her deep, reaching for honey, a dripping comb of it on the roof of her mouth. And she held to him; she was reaching too. His hands were everywhere, where she let them be, between the leaves of her breaths, picking grapes in the Lord's vineyard.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"My notion," she said.

Buttons and hooks.

Jacket and shirtwaist and shift and camisole. Lace and pleats, ruffles and overdrape. Worse than a goddamed shucking contest. Try to unhitch all that in the dark. Bone corset. Wire bustle. Bolts of brilliantine tacked around her waist. Poplin undershirts, layers of petticoats. Hooks and scalloped leather up her calves. Snaps and straps and stocking harness. Enough gear to outfit a team of horses. But he knew she was under there someplace. Finally he got her worked back to her sateen bloomers. He hulled these down onto the floor. But she wouldn't take off her long johns—her medicated scarlets.

"No no no no," she said. "I ain't never had ever'thing all off at once before. Not even to take a bath," she said.

Like a steer, I can try.

He got her cattywumpus onto the bed, lay this burden down. There were slots and trapdoors in her medicated scarlets, and he put a hand in through. There she was in all her sweet particulars, her flanks ribbed like a washboard from the corset. Pretty soon she was psalming right along, rolling around on the feather tick like a turned loose horse trying to rub out the saddle marks. But she wouldn't take off her medicated scarlets. She must have figured with her flannels on it was almost like it wasn't happening.

Step smart. Drop your britches. Hell's bells, her in her long johns, him in his shirt and collar, it's right formal. It's Sunday for sure. Cold feet on the tongued and grooved floor. She was still psalming. He hopped back in bed with her, it being the Christian thing to do. Path of righteousness: up the draw, into the cave, loaded for bear. What a friend we have in Jesus.

These goddamned flannels. Might as well play up to an old horse blanket.

Got the back slot undone, spread it open into a grin around her hips. O pearly gates. O doodads and curlycues. Her legs were hiked up, her long johns stretched like a fencerail between her stifles—a fine howdy do. As soon worry sardines out of a half open can, drink coffee with the spoon stuck in your eye. I've changed my notion, she said. No you ain't, he said. Yes I have, yes I have, she said.

Ike! she said.

He had the windmill going, valves and leathers and sucker

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

rods. In the oyster of the world. But she wouldn't kick off the trace chains. She was as helpful as a notch on a stick. Until the long johns split: the red flannel parted company right up the crotch; her legs fell apart like a deck of cards; Clabe like to lost his ace in the shuffle. But Johnnie Lee let out the prettiest hymn he'd ever heard. Then they were both bellying up to the bar. His breaths came fast. Wet branches in a wind struck down, whipped him, switched him. . . . The boy sobbed in a corner of the brush pen, doubled up, his face burning wet, the gasps rolling over him in waves, choking and drowning him, dragging at his guts. *Save me!* Clabe's back and his bones and his balls and his blood cried. But she was somewhere else, scrambling in the loft. He'd put her up there. His heart shook. This is the best of Hell. *Where is Your Almighty Face, and I'll blacken it with blood, hang it to a star.*

Here. *Here!* Here's Your damned tithe, right smack in the collection basket.

Light broke. It was a black sun.

Cold and slick as an empty oyster shell. Another starveout proposition.

"Get off me. You're too heavy. It's too much."

He rolled over onto the bed. The bed was tilted up at the foot, way up. It crowded the blood into his head. The bed turned slowly around in the dark, tipped up on one leg. Clabe grabbed hold of the tick.

"Oh my god, what *was* that? What did. Me. It was awful, awful. I was . . . squealing, weren't I? My god, how could I? How *could* I? Oh. Give me a cloth or something. Oh, this is terrible. Oh dear God, dear Jesus, forgive me, forgive me, forgive me, forgive me, that ain't never what I went . . .

"Just like some same as. Like a wild. Things. Oh, why'd you do it? *Why'd you go to do that?*"

The bed leveled off. The land leveled out. Here and there a stand of liveoaks.

Riding like a ghost through the spring wet.

"Oh. Oh. It's gonna be the trouble times for me. It will. I know it will. Oh, it hurts. I bet that's what you was after right from the start, weren't it? You bastard. Oh darling, is that all you was after? I should of knowed. I should of knowed. Oh, you're disgusting. Ever'body told me to watch out. But you was so good to me; you

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

was so sweet and purty, all that red curly hair. Nobody ever. *Why'd you have to go and do it?* I'll never be able to look a body in the face again. They'll see. They'll all know. Oh, I'm so ashamed. Claiborne, you do love me, don't you? You do, you do. Darling. That's the first time ever I done that. You know that. Only with you. Only just with you. We shouldn't of never. It's your fault. I just wet . . . went all to pieces. It was awful. You brung me to it. We got to make it right."

Christ, he was burnt to the socket. He was really dragging his hub.

" . . . like an old shoe. Is that what you mean to do? Is it? Well, I won't let you. I just won't let you. I love you, Claiborne, or I wouldn't of never. Never. Never. Never. Never. Dear. Sweet. Dearest darling dear. Are you asleep? *Are you going to sleep?* Oh you bastard, get out of here, get out of my bed, get out, get out. Claiborne? Claiborne, *please*. Please, darling, please. You can't *stay* here. Grandma's right downstairs."

She pinched him hard.

"Huh?" he said.

"Get up, wake up," she said.

"Stand a dose of Kookman's Bitters," he said.

"Get up. Go away. Move over. Get out. Shhh! *don't wake Grandma!* Oh, I hate you. Get up. I know you now. I know all what you are. You ain't no gentleman. Get out of my bed. Get up. You son of a bitch, you'll be sorry for this. You'll rule the day you ever done me like this. Get up. I love you, Claiborne. We'll settle this tomorrow. Get up. I wish I'd of never set eyes on you. All that sweettalk, all them fancy promises; I should of been listenin' to what your hands said. Oh Claiborne, don't you be so mean to me. I love you. We got to straighten this out. Get up. Wake up. Oh, you'll pay for this. I hope God comes down and hits you with a thunderbolt. I hope you catch your awful dingus in a throw rope. *Get up.*"

Now with his length stretched out on the hot ground, sticks and dirt and leaves in his nose and mouth, stuck to his wet cheeks, a slice of whiteness through his brain, all drained now, the boy fell asleep.

Something clicked against the window, beak and claws, a brown puzzlement, then flew off.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The sky showed pale as bleached domestic stretched out tight. No clouds up there, not a wrinkle. The star was a small bright hole in the cloth. It was as fierce bright as a lucifer, lit phosphorous, excepting that it held steady. If it'd been up there two hours back, in the full dark, a man could have walked by the light of it, it was that bright. Like some small moon.

Now it is Monday. The sky began to lighten, first pink and then yellowish, spreading through the cloth like that watery stuff that comes after the first hard blood in a bad wound. The bandages of light rolled into the room, unraveled across the ceiling. They lay out in streamers on the whitewashed walls. It was a plastered ceiling, flat, and mostly the light held together on it, pushing the wads of dark into the corners. The east wall was darkest, all around the window. Dark things stood up from the floor. A half dark mirror. Streak of light around a washbasin rim, shiny belly of a crock.

The star shone clear, mineral white, splinter bright, a frozen spark, the morning like a circle around it. It was a drop of cold fire hanging there, high in the sky and a little to the south, amongst the crisscross frames of the window. The air in the room was so close and still, the air outside the window so crisp and still, all the channels of the air so still, clear up to there. Sometimes it seemed like the star blinked, reddened back a speck, then sent out a sharper light, but it was a trick of the eyes, or of the space between. Clabe looked at it with his right eye, then with his left, then hard with both; the star held steady; it was as set as a piece of mica in quartz. It hung there quiet, cold and white, all in the easefulness of its self. Claiborne thought of the picture. The rooster crowed again down in the yard. A mourning dove sounded from a branch somewhere.

. . . Johnnie Lee was hard asleep. Her head was back, her eyes shut, her mouth dropped open a ways. Her hair looked more reddish now on the bolster. Christsake, all that fuss and bother. But she was as dead to the world now as a chunk of stone, her face smooth in sleep as a creekstone, no color to it but her lips (not red, but plainer, more like polished pecan hulls) and some dabs of freckles near her nose. Air was going in and out of her mouth; the coverlid went up and down regular. Claiborne could smell the vanilla, but it was a dry smell now. Poor gal. She had

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the coverlid pulled up tight under her chin. And likely she'd be keeping her particulars tucked up under her chin hereafter. The next man along would have to climb a briar to get to it.

Claiborne put back the comfort careful. He eased out of the bed and stepped onto the floor. The floor was cold. He felt around in the darkness on the floor and found his sackcoat, half under a chair. The photograph was in one of the pockets, and he took it out. The pasteboard was warped, the picture side smooth and cold. The white dress flashed.

Claiborne held the picture up to the light. He started to sit—jumped right back up. The chair bottom was as cold as an anvil. He sat on the edge of the bed.

The morning light seemed to move into the picture. It was like Clabe was holding a small box in his hand, and the same air and the same light was in the room and in it. The light in the room reached into the photograph, along the sides and on around the back. It ruffled across the painted leaves and in and out of the wrinkles at the bottom of the drop. You could see the line between the floor and the drop. There was a carpet on the floor; it didn't look anymore like grass than a scatter rug does. The gate post stood up into the air. Her hand was on it and she was about to step out, excepting that there was a wire grip up under her ears, in back of her head, that made her keep still. The dress was as white as stripped milk, salt, a china crock. And it was as solid as a crock, the way it held her. The high white collar lifted her head. Her body was prideful, upright in the bright dress. The long sleeves followed her arms. A crisp white puff of cloth at each shoulder. The white brocaded albatross cloth was puckered across the breasts; then it gathered down into her waist, of a sudden splashed out full: the skirt with its crinkly crepy look drifted to the floor. Such white summer stuff! She stood pert and straightbacked in the dress, but there wasn't any stiffness to her, not what was inside the dress. Her hands showed that. One hung loose out of its sleeve and rested against the skirt. The other, the right one, with its wrist on the gate post, drooped in the air, the fingers loose and easy. They were long, thin, particular fingers, without rings. A small black brooch like a beetle at her throat. But her face! Clabe craved to reach his hand into the picture, through the gloss surface, touch that face. He ran his fingers

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

back and forth above it, but it was all slick. He stared at her face. It looked so cool, and there was such a quiet to it. Her hair was pulled back tight. It was as black as a wet slate, and set off the round white face. A touch of a smile to her lips. Almost not a smile. More a knowing than a smile. And if she was of a mind, right now, to turn her head, or reach down with her hand and brush a wrinkle from her skirt, she'd do it natural, like she knew who she was. But she didn't move, kept looking straight ahead —not at the camera or the black tent or whoever was standing there behind, but right on past, clear through all that. She was looking into time. She was looking at Clabe. There were two bright spots in the black centers of her eyes, from the powder flash. But to Clabe they were more like openings in. She looked at him. He could almost see the fierce, woman's brain behind. He could almost see the print of her heart on her dress. Oh, but she was so *careful*, that's what it was! That's what that smile meant. There she stood in the put together world, gate post and carpet and painted leaves, and she was going up like fire, cold fire, wild, a spinning yell. Clabe saw it; it hit the back of his head. And her terrible quiet was, she kept a hold, tight on her self as the wire grip. She wore her body like her dress, moved it through the world, made it touch. She put her wrist to the gate post. *Can a woman do that?* Blood pounded in Claiborne's head. It crowded his throat. He stood up, stumbled over to the window, across a pile of clothes. All that fuss. Oh christ, her wildness, her quiet!

Outside, there was a pale spread of light lifting up, eastward above the hills. The star was almost doused; it was just a pinprick of light, about to quit. Clabe smelled coal oil. The window panes had been rubbed with a drop of coal oil, to make them clear. His hand left a fog mark on the glass; it shrunk away like a ghost's. The whole sky was lighter now. The last night's mist had settled down to a cover of dew. The ground was wet. Dew dripped from the horseshoes hung in the peach tree. There were some broken branches on the ground under the peach tree and the fig tree, and under a chinaberry tree over in the corner. A line of smashed down beanrow brush in the garden patch. Two brown hens were scratching and pecking down in the dooryard. A rooster flew up onto the paling fence, shook its feathers. It cocked an eye at the two hens, and at the outside country. Then it heisted

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a wing, jabbed a beak through its breast feathers, straightening them. The lot across the road was a grey flat, a stretch of dew. There was Clabe's hired rig, the mare cropping grass under the tree. They were going to cuss a blue streak at the livery stable when he fetched her back. Their best trotter. To hell with them. He'd pay. He had thirty dollars in his morral from the Croghan job. The mare and the trappings and buggy were wet. Some watery sparkles here and there. Now it's spring, a wet morning. The sky was brightening fast.

The dress went up like fire, the wrapped flesh; her face shone fierce in the picture. Her eyes looked hard at Clabe, as if she saw him.

The window was shut tight. There was more light in the room now. The air was close and still, stale—yes, like a woman's parlor, shades down and doors locked, smell of table scarves and dry flowers; it pinched the back of Clabe's nose. He could make out things in the room now. The bedstead over yonder, Johnnie Lee propped up asleep on the bolster like a wax doll, the counterpane half off onto the floor and a corner of it pulled up under her chin. Even her pores looked closed. Her weekday dress hung on the wall. A basin and pitcher were on a wash table. An oval mirror. Chair. A cedar box. A chest of drawers with a heap of woman's truck on top: tucking combs, thread, a cracked saucer with hairpins in it, the lamp, the clock, a paste brooch still pinned to its card like in a jeweler's shop, a shammy, a box of cornstarch powder, Ayer's Pills, Hostetter's Almanac, a hand mirror, a prayer book, and a hymnal like small black slabs. A sewing machine was on a table in the corner, clamped onto it like a meat grinder. A pile of clothes on the floor: bustle and petticoats and his string drawers—rag tag and bobtail from last night's tussle, looking like the leavings of a spring twister. It felt crowded in here.

A bird flitted across the window. *Twit.* There were two scissortails flying outside, a sign the frost season's over. Their pink sides flashed as they streaked across. The dove sounded. It'd come up closer. Some dirt daubers were building under the eave; one stuck its shiny gun metal blue head out, then took off. A morning hawk swung slow in its circle way up high. It caught the actual sun. Clabe heard old Granny Chant moving around downstairs. Then it was quiet. He smelled her coffee. It made him restless. The sun

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

was about to come up. —What the hell was he standing here for, bare assed in his shirt and collar? It was a new day; it was all a big orange show, eastward. The star went out.

Clabe's hands were sweaty. He wiped the photograph on his shirttail and tucked it safe into the coat pocket. He put on the coat. The window was so bright! Air. Trees. The world went on and on, one thing behind the other. That coffee smell was making Clabe's stomach grind. He dug around in the clothes pile, fished out his string drawers and britches one at a time and heisted them on. Johnnie Lee smiled. She was likely wrapping ribbon wire around a husband. She made a waking noise . . .

Clabe saw the sun for a minute from the top of the stairs: the hot bloody cap of it was bulging up. Then he was down the staircase four steps at a time. He reined in quick. Old Granny Chant straightened up from her work in the yard. She had on a big slat bonnet, an old black Ulster coat with a piece of blue apron hanging out below, and a pipe in her mouth. She looked at him bug-eyed. Her pipe dropped out of her mouth; her pruning shears clattered to the ground. Her face turned purple as a mustang grape. "Oh you tom cat!" she said. Clabe didn't stop for his boots. He didn't bother to open the gate—just sailed right on over. The pipe hit his shoulder and bounced into the road. Every sandbur in the county was in that lot and he was hopping all over the place. It sounded like she was giving him unshirted hell behind; he didn't wait to study it. He jerked the reins loose, lit into the buggy, slapped the straps at the mare's rump. She took off with a snort, aimed straight for the trees. He gave her her head. Birds flew out of bushes and rabbits scattered. They hit the trees like spit through a screen door. Clabe didn't know how they got through whole. Finally they came out on the other side. The mare pulled up a slope and back onto the road, about a quarter of a mile from the house. The sun burned bright. Clabe felt damned good.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ROBERT HASS

Concerning the Afterlife the Indians of Central California Had Only the Dimmest Notion

It is morning because the sun has risen.

I wake slowly in the early heat,
pick berries from the thorny vines.
They are deep red,
sugar-heavy, fuzzed with dust.
The eucalyptus casts a feathered shadow
on the house which gradually withdraws.

After breakfast,
you will swim and I am going to read
that hard man Thomas Hobbes
on the causes of the English civil war.
There are no women in his world,
Hobbes, brothers fighting brothers
over goods.
I see you in late afternoon,
your hair dry-yellow, plaited
from the waves, a faint salt sheen
across your belly and along your arms.
The kids bring from the sea
intricate calcium gifts of shell
black turbans, angular green whelks
the whorled opalescent unicorn.

We may or may not
feel some irritation at the dinner hour.
The first stars, and after dark
Vega hangs in the lyre

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the dipper tilts above the hill.
Travelling
in Europe Hobbes was haunted by motion.
Sailing or riding, he was suddenly aware
that all things move.
We will lie down,
finally, in our heaviness
and touch and drift toward morning.

The Pornographer

He has finished a day's work.
Placing his pencil in a marmalade jar
which is colored the soft grey
of a crumbling Chinese wall
in a Sierra meadow, he walks
from his shed into the afternoon
where orioles rise aflame from the orchard.
He likes the sun and he is tired
of the art he has spent on the brown starfish
anus of his heroine, the wet duck's-feather tufts
of armpit and thigh, tender and roseate enfoldings
of labia within labia, the pressure and darkness
and long sudden falls from slippery stone
in the minds of the men with anonymous tongues
in his book. When he relaxes, old images
return. He is probably in Central Asia.
Once again he is marched to the wall.
All the faces are impassive. Now
he is blinded. There is a long silence
in which he images clearly the endless sky
and the horizon, swift with cloud-scuds.
Each time, in imagination, he attempts
to stand as calmly as possible
in what is sometimes morning warmth,
sometimes evening chill.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Pornographer, Melancholy

Summer is over and his friends are gone—
vanished as inexplicably
as the pearly fluids
which gushed from sporting ladies
in the novels of a hundred years before.

The leaves of the plane tree
brown and curl, the world
tenses in the early cold toward final
literal insistences: autumn,
death, the cold comfort of reason
and clitoral orgasm. In the day's work
he married two seven-sided orgies
in a ceremony as delicate and involuted
as copulating octopi,
wafting, pale purple
hedges of sea heather.

His friends are gone and he is reflective.
The essence of seasons is repetition.
They die and shine, die and shine.

The Pornographer at the End of Winter

He had thought March was the blackbird's month.
April is the blackbird's month.
They lord it in the trees. Their cries
are the seasonal delectation.

He leaves off the defoliation of drugged virgins
to read calligraphies of pheasant tracks
in the last crisp snow around the soggy fields.
Some buds, magenta-colored, green-veined,
sap rising.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

There is a high, windy vault of sky & precise
two-note whistles from a cardinal
repeat at intervals and thin to the shape
of leafless trees along the forest edge.
Very soon he is cold. Eyes watery with light,

he hurries toward the house,
bored by the frail white body, coltish, slack
among cushions he has not colored yet.
He breathes muddy April, imagines
limbs akimbo, small swart hairs.

All around him is the gravel music
of the blackbirds' cries.

Politics of a Pornographer

Like America, his art consists
in the absence of scale. He is no less
mad, but his Oedipus
meets, always, at the crossroads
his mother and trembles in the sun.
The dust is mallow
and the light is mallow-brown.
In his mind there are only
a summer meadow, breasts,
the mossy tuft, his cock,
and twining legs.
There is no walled city come to.
The sphinx proposes nothing.
There is no plague.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

PO FEI HUANG

Count One

Count one, count one again,
count one.
Each bud has
words it wants to say—
painters in the past
and present have painted
many plum flowers.

In the three miles walk
of floating hidden fragrance,
the heaven, if it had feelings
it wouldn't get old; and there
will be always you and me
and the plum blossoms.

Elegy in November

Aren't sounds the only
trace that life leaves,
and sounds always have
love for the wind, yet
the wind has gone
forever?

The Winter Solstice

My heart is warm.

Through the window
the moonlight falls
on this piece of paper;

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

whose words shall I
borrow to reveal the truth?

I'll start to paint a
petal a day and leave
words aside. When the number
of the petals reaches
eighty-one on my painting
of the plum blossoms,

the day will be warm.

Words

1

Let me brew you
a pot of tea.

(It'll take a while.)

You may flip through
from T'ang to Sung,
a few pages of history,

then we shall sit down
and talk about poetry.

2

You're late.
It doesn't matter.

It's nothing but a
couple of decades.

I'm wiser than before,
so you also are.

3

It happened before.
It happened always.

If words are valued,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

if books are valued,
if people are valued,
then you are not living
for nothing. And I
just happened to have
lived in the past, and
now the present and
even the future.

4

When you're here
you don't hear my
words.
There's no word,
there's no word. . . .

Anxiety

It twists
my arm.
Generally,
I fight back.
Pain penetrates.
It goes through
all of my body.
Suddenly,
there's a relief:
a touch of poetry.

June Day

Grow a little philosophy
near the window.
See it
bloom with books on desk.

It smells sunshine in
morning, always in morning,
life forever buds.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

In the Woods

Let the summer leaves
wrap you up but not too
tight, so you still can
breathe the fresh blue sky,

and you pare your heart
to be a seed; to be softer,
to be a naked kernel.

You hear whispering, pointing
out to you the age of each
tree, familiarly announcing
the name of each bird.
And you smile and say:
"I understand their language."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

JOHN SIMON

The Aesthetics of the Actor's Appearance

An important but seldom written about aspect of stage aesthetics is the physical appearance of the performer. Many evils have befallen the theatre in our time, and I dare say that the decline in actors' and actresses' looks is not the most important among them. Neither, however, is it the least important, for all its being the least discussed. In public, that is; in private, one often hears comments about the unbearable exterior of this or that performer. The problem has become more disturbing of late for two reasons. One is that it ties in alarmingly with a defiant decline in personal aesthetics—the militant slovenliness of today's young. The other is its relationship to the new emphasis on the outlandish and ugly for kicks, as witness a new batch of fashion models in the high-class magazines whose looks range from weird to odious.

But even more worrisome, as far as the theatre is concerned, is that the unsightliness of its practitioners may contribute to the further cooling of an already tepid interest in theatre among its discriminating patrons. For theatre once had glamor—some would go so far as to call it a mystique, but I prefer the more secular "glamor." And a good part of that glamor was its leading ladies: women of marked physical beauty. Let us not speak slightingly of physical beauty just because there is something called spiritual beauty that is generally conceded to be a much finer thing. Spiritual beauty, in any case, is not all that useful to an actress: it is a slow worker, and in the two hours or so an actress holds the stage it might barely begin to make its presence felt. But physical beauty, as if aware of its transience, wastes no time in casting its spell.

To be sure, acting ability comes first—that nobody can deny. The only trouble is that acting ability may be even more in the eye of the beholder than beauty. Has any account come down to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

us disputing the beauty of such actresses as Anne Bracegirdle, Anne Oldfield or Peg Woffington? But consider talent, or even genius. Asked who was the greatest actress of modern times, anyone even moderately well read in such matters would unhesitantly reply, "Duse." Surely "the Duse," as the diva used to be referred to, was an absolute actress if ever there was one. Well, let me take you now on a little tour of investigation of her artistry, and show you how the foremost authorities disagree.

In 1892, the young Hugo von Hofmannsthal gave this exalted account of Duse, noting that the limits of her art lay

> not in her appearance, I do not know what she looks like. The words beautiful and ugly have no meaning for her, her body is nothing but the shifting projections of her changing moods. Over her face glide other faces: a coquettish little girl with mocking eyes and lips; a pale woman with the worriedly greedy eyes of passion; a gaunt bacchante with hot, deep-sunk eyes and dry lips around her open mouth, her neck muscles wildly swollen; and a lovely, cold statue with that great peace upon her glowing brow. She has a different walk each time: the springily even one of the great lady, the trippingly balancing one of little Nora, the sensually soft, dragging one of the poor, sentimental cocotte. All her limbs speak a different language every time: the pale, fine fingers of Fédora seem, the next day, changed into the languid, cajoling ones of the lady of the camellias, and, on the next, into the fidgety, frolicsome ones of the woman in the doll house . . .

Hofmannsthal's paean continues along these lines, and is echoed three years later (June 8, 1895) by Bernard Shaw, who also claims for Duse that hallmark of greatness, the ability to transmute herself for each new part:

> Duse's own private charm has not yet been given to the public. She gives you Césarine's charm, Marguerite Gauthier's [*sic*] charm, the charm of La Locandiera, the charm, in short, belonging to the character she impersonates; and you are enthralled by its reality and delighted by the magical skill of the artist without for a moment feeling any complicity either on your part or on hers in the passion represented.

Very good; except that we have the completely antithetical words of a drama critic of almost equal stature, Max Beerbohm. On March 9, 1907, Max reminisced about the Hedda of Duse, who "in this, as in every other part that she plays, behaved like a guardian-angel half-asleep at her post over humanity. Her air of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

listlessness, in this instance, happened to be apt; but otherwise she showed not a shadow of comprehension of her part." Earlier (May 26, 1900), after seeing Duse in repertory, Max had written: "From first to last, she is the same in Fédora as in Magda, in Magda as in Paula, in Paula as in the Princesse Georges, and the Princesse Georges as in La Gioconda . . . My prevailing impression is of a great egoistic force; of a woman overriding, with an air of sombre unconcern, plays, mimes, critics and public."

You might with some plausibility argue that Beerbohm is a hostile witness; but here now is equally damaging testimony from a sympathetic witness—more damaging, in fact, because it is meant as praise yet corroborates Max's view of Duse as a "personality," the very opposite of a great actress. Shortly before her death, Duse appeared in New York as Mrs. Alving in *Ghosts,* and Stark Young wrote (November 6, 1923):

> In the course of the writing, a provincialism and drabness of [Ibsen's] mind more than once appears; Mrs. Alving and the dramatist are now and again insistent and parochial and without imagination. Duse has no great opinion of Mrs. Alving, for one reason because, as she said to me, Mrs. Alving is a liar, to herself and to others. But Duse from her very first entrance put distinction into the part. She was a great lady . . . Ibsen's Mrs. Alving now and again falls into platitude, stubborn and prim. Duse turns such passages into what is not obvious platitude but passionate memory. . . .

This is bad business. The primadonna clearly knew that she was "improving" on what Ibsen had written. Because Duse was a great lady, Mrs. Alving, too, must become one. Even assuming that Ibsen was somehow at fault (a point that Young, perhaps under the influence of Duse, is all too ready to concede), it is not the performer's job to make up for the author's lapses, least of all when the author is a great playwright deliberately portraying a less than admirable woman. The actress who places herself above the part she plays, who makes the part come to her rather than the other way round, is a personality, a star—something less than an artist in the true sense.

All this by way of demonstrating the relativity of histrionic talent, even the greatest. It would almost appear that beauty, or at least allure, is a less debatable commodity. Consider the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

assets of Duse's great rival, Sarah Bernhardt, so derided and subordinated to Duse by Shaw (in his column of June 15, 1895), and generally held to be more of a character, a personality, an inspired ham than a profound and versatile actress. Though her very admirers tended to admit that Sarah was always playing Sarah, even her detractors could not deny her a potently feminine, erotic appeal. Shortly before her death at seventy-eight, Bernhardt was visited by Colette, who was to recall in *Trait pour trait* this vignette of the old actress pouring coffee:

> Her amputated body no longer counted, stuffed into a somber cloth with great folds. But the white face, the little hands still shone like crumpled flowers. I did not tire of contemplating the blue of her eyes, which changed according to the movements—so lively still—of that imperious and small head. . . . I consign here, with respect, one of the last stances of the near-octogenarian tragedienne: the delicate and faded hand offering the full cup; the floral azure of the eyes, so young in a network of wrinkles; the quizzical and laughing coquetry of the bent head, and that irreducible eagerness to please, please still, please even unto the doors of death.

I have been reading and rereading lately a number of tributes to the grace and loveliness of various performers. The one that moved me most was Gerhart Hauptmann's 1927 necrologue for the celebrated German actress Agnes Sorma (1863-1927), whom even the usually prosaic *Oxford Companion to the Theatre* describes as "a beautiful woman, with dark hair and eyes, and a charming smile." It is this smile that Hofmannsthal recalled as his one indelible memory of Sorma. "Her smile," he wrote, "which shimmered over all of her expressions, could intensify into Circean witchery or become wholly ironic and cool; she smiled as a tragic heroine, until the smile went numb under the horror of fate, but did not vanish entirely—and as Mrs. Alving, this wonderful face let us behold the rarest thing that can be seen: the smile of despair." Yet it was not the neoromantic Hofmannsthal who said the finest thing about Sorma, but the naturalist, or ex-naturalist, Hauptmann:

> This dear and great artist was, so to speak, a queen of comeliness. Whether one saw her in society or on the stage, one felt fortunate: the Graces had kissed her in the cradle. For all that, she was elemental as a performer, but then, again, it remained her greatest

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> appeal to stay confined, even in the strongest outbursts of passion, within the boundaries of sheer womanly loveliness *(selbst bei den stärksten Ausbrüchen der Leidenschaft in den Grenzen des schlechthin Weiblich-Schönen gebunden zu sein).*

Praising her admirableness as woman, artist and lady, Hauptmann concluded that "the type of this woman has always been a rare and happy accident."

The importance of an actress of such consummate grace is twofold. First for the playwright, who often models his characters on the performers available to him. We know that even Shakespeare shaped some of his characters for specific actors, and when, with the Restoration, women mounted the stage, actresses became paramount influences on the playwright's imagination. Two of the finest parts in Restoration drama, for example, were created directly for actresses who aroused in the authors more than theatrical interest: Elizabeth Barry was the begetter of Otway's Belvidera, and Anne Bracegirdle the prototype for Congreve's Millamant. But let me skip to modern times and quote Giraudoux's comment in *Visitations* (1947):

> The actor is not only an interpreter, he is an inspirer; he is the living mannequin by whose means many authors personify a vision as yet vague; and the great actor: a great inspirer. . . . It is thus that my Alcmène in *Amphitryon 38,* thus that my Judith spared me all hesitation by slipping, from the days of their births, into actresses who immediately gave them complexions, appearances, voices—the former into Valentine Tessier, the latter into Elizabeth [*sic*] Bergner.

But what sort of heroines, I ask you, would your Sandy Dennises or your Sada Thompsons inspire? Yet even when a dramatist does not have a specific actress as the model for a heroine, an attractive interpreter can still serve him well. "I was always of the conviction," wrote Frank Wedekind in *Schauspielkunst* (1910), "that *Erdgeist* played as I conceived it, and without the interpretation of Gertrud Eysoldt, would have aroused ten years ago only displeasure and moral indignation. Frau Eysoldt played precisely that kind of woman and beauty that were, at the time, the prevailing literary-artistic taste in Berlin."

Which brings me to the importance of the lovely actress to the theatregoing public. Clearly, audiences are impressed and in-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

fluenced by the beauty of actresses, and model themselves upon them. Today this aspect of suasion has been largely preëmpted by the film actress, who is seen by many more spectators, and by especially large numbers of the far more influenceable young. There is something else, however, that a stage actress can do more powerfully than her screen competitor; the nature of this comes out charmingly in a contemporary evocation of Anne Bracegirdle by Anthony Aston[1]:

> She was of a lovely Height, with dark-brown Hair and Eye-brows, black sparkling Eyes, and a fresh blushy Complexion; and, whenever she exerted herself, had an involuntary Flushing in her Breast, Neck and Face, having continually a chearful Aspect, and a fine set of even white Teeth; never making an *Exit,* but that she left the Audience in an Imitation of her pleasant Countenance.

There is a sense in which the "chearful Aspect" of physical beauty and charm is conveyed by the living presence of an actress even to the most moribund of audiences.

I have argued on various occasions for the need in our theatre for actresses winning both as performers and as women. But in these women's lib times, when such views are promptly dubbed sexist, I have been consistently misunderstood and excoriated either by feminists or by other readers who, often because of their own unsightliness, bristle at the mention of actors' physiques. Yet it seems perspicuous and ungainsayable to me: the actor or actress performs with everything he or she has, including face and body. If that face and body cannot move us with their comeliness or nobility, the performer is just as much at fault as if he or she were insufficient in *mimesis,* diction, deportment, timing, or what have you. When, in *New York* magazine, I attacked Zoe Caldwell as Colette for being too fat and charmless for the part, and when I further questioned the desirability of her baring one vast, pendulous breast (she was nursing at the time), the brouhaha this aroused was deafening; letters poured in to the editors demanding my dismissal, my head, my eternal damnation. Over and over, the point was made—as it was later even in street-corner discussions—that an actress's looks have nothing to do with her performance, which is all a critic is allowed to review.

1 Quoted in J. H. Wilson's delightful *All the King's Ladies* (Chicago, 1958), a book that has much to say about my present subject. See in particular the chapter entitled "The Actress and the Play."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

This narrow outlook bears out two failures of the popular—and, for that matter, critical—view of theatre and theatrical criticism. This view is basically anti-aesthetic, addressing itself only to technical aspects of a performance and, perhaps, a few selected attributes of the performer's personality. What remains ignored is the substratum: the man or woman up there on the stage. One might with equal right discuss what a sculptor has hewed and chiseled, but ignore the material he chose to work in. Thus the portrait bust of a fair Scandinavian girl done in darkest basalt would look, to put it mildly, peculiar, however deftly executed. (A related issue here is the insensitivity, innate or cultivated, of audiences to black actors in white roles—the blithe acceptance, for example, of a Negro Joan of Arc or King Lear, as if such casting did not produce unsuitable, disturbing implications.) An actor, for historical, psychological, or aesthetic reasons, must look the part he is playing: Quasimodo should not have the lineaments of Adonis, and Beatrice-Joanna should not be a harridan.

The unprepossessing actress can, obviously, play character parts; no one in his right mind would demand beauty from the witches in *Macbeth*. But are you a more enlightened, civilized, sensitive spectator if you do not boggle at an aged, fat, dish-faced Juliet, or are you, in fact, an insensitive clod, oblivious to aesthetic values? Obviously, acting that is so great that it makes you forget all else does exist, but it is comparatively rare; even when Duse, in advanced age, played younger parts without make-up and with her grey locks showing, a good many theatregoers were unable to suspend their disbelief. Others, to be sure, did so. Most performers, however, are not endowed with histrionic gifts able to overshadow all else, and had, therefore, better look to their appearances; often this involves no more than an actress's keeping trim, taking care of herself, and showing some taste in hair-styles and clothes.

Of course, there is always the reader who fulminates, "What right have you to decide who is or is not good-looking enough for a given part?" That is a perfectly otiose question, and makes no more sense than asking a critic what right he has to criticize plays, stagecraft, scenery. It is a question stemming from that benighted notion, which will apparently never die, that criticism can somehow be objective, factual, scientific—rather than subjective, im-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

pressionistic, artistic. Or it may be part of that even more defunct but, alas, unburiable delusion that criticism should be constructive, i.e., make everybody feel good. The truth is simply that a critic is a man or woman of good taste (whatever that means exactly), and such taste must be presumed to extend to physiognomies, bodies and limbs as much as to facial play, gestures, sound of voice, delivery of lines, and grace or gracelessness of movement.

A seemingly more sophisticated and cogent objection would have it that an actress cannot help being miscast: she needs work to make a living and cannot argue with the director about her suitability to the part she is offered. On closer inspection, this argument seldom holds water. The kind of part requiring good looks, say, Desdemona or Lydia Languish or Hilda Wangel, is rarely forced upon some deserving novice who has all the qualifications save the physical ones. Such parts are usually given to established actresses, popular favorites, producers' or directors' mistresses or wives (Zoe Caldwell, for instance, is married to Robert Whitehead, who produced *Colette*); occasionally, they may also be given to talented newcomers. If a successful established actress is offered such a part, what prevents her from declining it and getting something else? And if a newcomer is to be chosen, why can't it be one who has the physical qualifications, too? The supply of performers is far in excess of the demand, and a director can afford to be choosy. Still, if he picks an ill-favored countenance over a radiant one, should we not blame him rather than the owner of that unfortunate face? Perhaps; but will it make much difference if the review reads "Mr. X. is to be castigated for casting the homely Miss Y. as Juliet"? As soon stick to the simple statement of Miss Y.'s physical unsuitability; it is no more devastating and saves space.

I spoke earlier of two failures in the popular and critical sensibilities that cause outcries against assessments of an actor's physique. So far I discussed the sheer aesthetic failure of not responding adequately to beauty and ugliness. But there is also an ethical misconception: the notion that criticism is a social act—social in the sense of good manners in public behavior. If I would not consider going up to Miss Y. at a party and making some remark about her plainness, what gives me the right to do this in a pub-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

lished critique, where it must hurt even more? This is a gross confusion of party-going with theatregoing, of the drawing-room with the playhouse, the coffee table with the critic's desk. "Discourteous" and "rude" are valid terms as they pertain to social behavior, but irrelevant and meaningless in criticism. There, too, tones vary, and some may be more felicitous or efficacious than others. But the critic who has, for example, a Barbra Streisand, Liza Minnelli, Sandy Dennis or Zohra Lampert to contend with may well be pushed beyond all endurance and retaliate in less than ultrarefined fashion. If the concept of manners is to be evoked at all, it might apply as much to the obnoxiously self-serving displays with which certain repellent actresses assault our sensibilities. The same goes for actors, too, but one is always more sensitive to the gracefulness or disgracefulness of the opposite sex, aesthetics and sexuality being more closely related than is commonly admitted.

The trouble, in large part, is open admissions. There have always been open admissions for performers in this country: no one ever had to undergo any sort of winnowing by a Royal Conservatory or State Academy of Dramatic Arts, where the Mrs. Worthingtons of this land would be told not to put their daughters on the stage, or the daughters themselves be so informed. Looks, obviously, would not be the main criterion, but neither would they be completely overlooked. Failing beauty, of course, there is always the alternative of charm, but that most elusive of qualities is no less infrequent on the New York stage. It is perhaps best defined by Rilke, who wrote this about Duse to his patroness, Princess Marie von Thurn und Taxis: "She magnifies without a stage, without a play, quotidian, unrefined life; the small, hasty, temporary happening comes into its own in her bearing, goes beyond itself—would be awed by seeing itself there and would stay, stand still, and no longer pass by." This was in July of 1912, when Eleonora was 53, and we must discount a measure of poet's and adorer's exaggeration; but can we imagine a contemporary American poet, however impassioned, writing anything like this about Maureen Stapleton?

For the preceding remarks are, to an extent, occasioned by Maureen Stapleton's appearance as Georgie in a revival of Clifford Odets's *The Country Girl,* directed by John Houseman for

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Washington's new Kennedy Center, then transferred to New York for a "limited engagement." What possible reason could there have been for reviving this poor and by now completely irrelevant play, which its own author considered a potboiler? It was written at the end of Odets's career, when that dubious wave of thirties' leftist enthusiasm and passionate, sentimental overwriting had long since spent itself, and Odets stood revealed for what he was: a well-meaning, mildly skillful hack, like the rest of our thirties' dramatists. A hack who had lost his verve: even in 1950 this play about the rehabilitation of an aging, drunken actor by a young director who believes in him and by a tough, long-suffering wife seemed an unrewarding subject clumsily handled. Neither all that stuff about the mystique of the theatre, nor the backstage intrigues, nor the limp love triangle Odets perfunctorily threw in had much interest even then. We never find out what drove the actor to drink in the first place, and we do not get to like him sufficiently to care about whether he'll make it, and if the wife he emotionally exploits and also maligns will choose to stay with him. Still less do we care about the unconvincing semblance of a nascent love between the wife and the director.

But the ultimate absurdity is the present casting of Miss Stapleton as Georgie, the wife. Though middle-aged, Georgie is supposed to be still rather attractive. Her husband passes her off as a former Miss America, a story for which the canny director, even before he becomes interested in her, readily falls. On several occasions various people comment on Georgie's good looks, and we are treated to a scene in which the young director passionately seizes and kisses her. With Maureen Stapleton in the role, this looks like the unbelievable turning into the perverted. For the actress is one of the homeliest—perhaps, in fact, the homeliest—on Broadway. She presents a large, amorphous body out of which protrude flipperlike limbs and a face without a single redeeming feature. Whereas classical proportions would have the head go seven to seven-and-a-half times into the length of the entire human being, some on-the-spot calculations with my pen as yardstick revealed Miss Stapleton's head (hairdo, I admit, included) to go only five or five-and-a-half times into her total extension. Add to this the posture of a Michel Simon, a gait more suited to the bowling alley than to the stage, a gin-soaked voice whose range may not

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

exceed a cricket's, an accent that might wait on you at Woolworth's, and you have the portrait of one of America's leading stage actresses.

The scene in which George Grizzard, who looks young and handsome, grabs and kisses Miss Stapleton was, I write it advisedly, rough sailing for my stomach. No doubt women as unprepossessing get kissed in this world, but it happens among four walls and between two consenting adults. Remove the fourth wall, invite an audience, charge admissions, and you have got yourself something halfway between a freak show and a public nuisance. The fact that it is all lauded by critics and applauded by audiences is, to my mind, only further proof of our cultural, artistic and aesthetic decadence—if, that is, further proof were needed.

Consider: the great shrine of culture for Washington and the nation, the Kennedy Center, opens with Leonard Bernstein's *Mass,* a piece whose eclectic, mindless vulgarity perfectly matches the building that houses it. In charge of the Center is Roger Stevens, a real-estate millionaire and heavy contributor to the Democratic Party; he is a former Broadway producer of no particular taste, was put in charge of cultural affairs by L.B.J., and his public utterances were worthy of Dwight Eisenhower. The Kennedy Center was immediately up to its neck in labor trouble, the stagehands' union having squeezed out of Stevens a contract whose terms were a new height in chicanery—more like blackmail. Since then, the Center has housed a number of questionable cultural offerings designed especially for the needs of the uncommitted middlebrow. One of these is John Houseman's revival of *The Country Girl.*

The idea, then, was to put on something hick-dazzling and burgher-approved. "Next only to *Golden Boy* . . . *The Country Girl* was Odets's most successful play," writes Gerald Weales in his Odets monograph. I suspect that the reason for this was the perfect casting of the original production. As the ex-star, Paul Kelly, an understated movie actor with an ascetic, tormented, Hibernian face, conveyed admirably both excessive consumption of liquids and insufficient ingestion of solids; as the director, Steven Hill, a fleshy, dark, Mediterranean type, was voluble, mercurial, boyishly ardent—the perfect antithesis of Kelly's desiccation. In the middle stood Uta Hagen: quiet, repressed but

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

smouldering, with a strength that seemed to surface after traveling a great internal distance, but then arriving in triumph and, above all, with style. She was a handsome woman, a trifle too masculine, perhaps, to be beautiful (Michelangelo would have painted her with pleasure), with a solidity of build and forcefulness of gaze that were commanding and would be irresistible to such weaker men as the actor and director in the play. The performing of this trio was real ensemble work, the whole appreciably greater than the sum of the parts Odets had written.

For the play is poorly structured, pedestrian, trivial, unsurprising; its language, moreover, is banal even for Odets. Cliché jostles cliché, simplest observations are peddled as insights, the theatre is presented in that irritatingly phoney light of yes-what-grubby-hustling-but-oh-what-glory-too, and the minor characters are stereotypes while the major ones are fuzzy and uncompelling. Yet John Houseman (whose recent volume of theatrical reminiscences, *Run-through*, shows an attitude toward theatre not unlike that of the play) evidently perceived *The Country Girl* as a middle-class classic ripe for revival with suitably crowd-pleasing stars. Well, Jason Robards is boring as the actor, repeating for the umpteenth time his combination of cuddlesomeness and bluster. Twice in his career Robards was impressive: in *The Iceman Cometh* and in *Long Day's Journey into Night;* the rest of the time he has merely rehashed bits and pieces from those two performances with ever-decreasing returns. George Grizzard, as the director, fares equally unwell; he is a fascinating actor when his agile, somewhat femininely insinuating personality can wiggle into an appropriately oblique and various role. His voice, for instance, has a slightly querulous tone, but can also slither with a sinisterly serpentine grace, and he looks like a slightly depraved matinee idol. All this is wasted on, or misplaced in, the part of the director. And then there is Maureen Stapleton, droning, lumbering, fishwifing on. Time and again she even misinterprets her lines, usually turning something serious into farce, and wrecking the hell out of what little pathos the play might have. (Here, of course, the director is equally to blame.) But the audience, at least on opening night, chortled, whooped and bravoed it up as if witnessing the première of a masterpiece whose last performance would coincide with Judgment Day.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The reviews were commensurate and predictable. Clive Barnes in the *Times* danced his famous eggshell minuet, having it, as usual, both ways with "a great theatrical melodrama . . . I exulted in its sheer vulgar theatricality." There was "grand-slam virtuoso acting" in this "splendid, no-holds-barred, no-bars-held [???] performance" in which the "superb" Miss Stapleton "alone would justify Odets." We were informed that "Broadway is illuminated with these obvious but thrilling fireworks." In his Sunday column, Walter Kerr wrote, "Thank God someone remembers—or once did—what the shape of a dramatic tug-of-war looks like." "The eruptions," he concluded, "are face-to-face, hand-to-hand, honest enough as psychology, tub-thumpingly gratifying as showmanship." With all those unbarred holds, unheld bars, tugged ropes and thumped tubs, here, clearly, was the ultimate cross between Barnum & Bailey and Spike Jones. But my favorite comments, as usual, came from Richard Watts of the *Post:* ". . . lessons in what acting at its best can be," Watts warbled; "the American theatre has no players of loftier distinction." If the latter remark be true, and it just may be, God pity the American theatre: that much loftiness can lift it right off the map into oblivion.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

WENDELL BERRY

The Strangers

The voices of travelers on the hill road
at dusk, calling down to me:
"Where are we? Where
does this road go?"
They have followed the ways
by which the country is forgot.
For them, places have changed
into their names, and vanished.
The names rustle in the foliage
by the roadside, furtive
as sparrows. My mind shifts
for whereabouts. Have I found them
in a country they have lost?
Are they lost in a country
I have found? How can they
learn where they are from me,
who have found myself here
after an expense of history
and labor six generations long?
How will they understand my speech
which holds this to be its place
and is conversant with its trees
and stones. We are lost
to each other. I think of changes
that have come without vision
or skill, a new world made
by the collision of particles.
Their blanched faces peer
from their height, waiting
an answer I know too well to speak.
I speak the words they do not know.
I stand like an Indian
before the alien ships.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Leaving Home

Whose light is this
that is mine, that
in the shine of the rain
flashes from every leaf
and brightens the rows
where the young stalks
rise, as if bidden
by a knowing woman's hand?
This is no time to go.

The new building stands
unfinished, raw boards
geometric in the air, a man's
design climbing out of the ground
like a tree. When I go
I will carry away its dream.

The light that is mine is not
mine. Were I, like all my kind, to go
and not come back, this light
would return like a faithful woman
until the pent stalk rose
to the shattering of its seed.

No time is a time to go,
and so any time is. Do not wait
to know whose light this is.
Once the heart has felt
the ever wakening
woman's touch of the light,
there are no more farewells.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

W. S. MERWIN

Summits

Mountains bloom in spring they shine in summer
they burn in autumn
but they belong to winter
every day we travel farther and at evening
we come to the same country
mountains are waiting but is it for us
all day the night was shining through them
and many of the birds were theirs

Dogs

Many times loneliness
is someone else
an absence
then when loneliness is no longer
someone else many times
it is someone else's dog
that you're keeping
then when the dog disappears
and the dog's absence
you are alone at last
and loneliness many times
is yourself
that absence
but at last it may be
that you are your own dog
hungry on the way
the one sound climbing a mountain
higher than time

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

VERNON YOUNG

Hands Across the Sea

1. *The Great American Film*

THE GREAT AMERICAN FILM has now been made—in Sweden. Directed by Jan Troell, adapted from four novels by Vilhelm Moberg, *The Emigrants,* a seven-hour film in two parts, is in my unreserved opinion one of the great achievements of poetic naturalism in the history of film-making and an experience that again demonstrates what Americans hate to hear: that the European cinema is unfailingly superior and can even beat them on their own ground. I have written many disparaging words on the Swedish subject, which I have no thought of retracting, but I would be a churl if I did not acknowledge the phenomenal excellence maintained by four overlapping film artists of international importance since the Swedish film's rebirth in the early Forties: Arne Sucksdorff, Alf Sjöberg, Ingmar Bergman and now Jan Troell, who declared himself in 1967 with *Here Is Your Life* yet remained all but unknown to Anglo-American criticism until this year when Part I of *The Emigrants* was nominated for an Oscar.

Troell, while in a Swedish continuity established, we might say, by Victor Sjöstrom and his contemporaries before War I, owes his more immediate inspiration to Arne Sucksdorff who pioneered the wildlife study in Sweden with a dozen remarkable short films thirty years ago. Today, because of Sucksdorff's searching example and because no lyrical subject is more present to Swedes than that of the forest primeval, marvellous landscape movies are a commonplace on Swedish television. There are even two film-makers, unknown abroad—Bengt Danielsson and Boris Engström—as minutely sentient as Sucksdorff to the secret signals that lift clouds, impel birds and marshal the seasons and who, like Sucksdorff, have the art of concentrating on any one of a thousand familiar motions—a raindrop sliding down a windowpane, a tuft of ice-bound grass melting in the spring—until it assumes the character of something unseen before, or unimaginable and prodigious. Troell, too, has this gift, but his susceptibility embraces much more than the world of grass and ice. He is inordinately alive to anything that moves or is moved: an animal, a swing, a flower-stem snapped by the passing blast of an express train; a boat limping into drydock; an infant writhing with colic; an oak-leaf loosened by the chemistry of autumn; snow that kills in the ear and ripens the seed; the visible as well as nose-y pleasure of smoke from a pipe; the hands of a man gripping an axe or clasping a mug-handle shaped as a woman; above all, the human face—credulous or dour, cunning or blankly simple, grooved by wind, age and dull labor or blotched by

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a diet of rancid pork, radiant with love or wrecked by time and the cupidity of fellow-men. His ear is equally acute. The sound-track of *The Emigrants,* sparse in dialogue, is fluid with workaday melodies: harness-leather and cart-axle noises, the ripping of a saw, the coursing of muffled streams, the lamentations of southward-moving geese and the drone of complacent bees. No living film-maker has such a scope of instinctive life-knowledge and the power to convert it into indelible moving pictures as this young man, not yet 41, who *directs, photographs* and *edits* his own films! Last year, acres of critical dust were raised over that synthetic product, *The Go-Between,* in which Joseph Losey attempted to comment on the social scene, wherein innocence is crippled, by intercutting shots of deer ambling through the shadowed grass: feeble parentheses, because Losey has no authentic feeling for the natural world. Few directors have, you conclude, after you've spent a few hours with Troell's cinema.

The Moberg novels from which the Troell film was adapted were probably a mixed blessing; their explicitness must have been hard to ignore or subordinate. Fortunately, the absence in them of anything which can't be seen by the eye makes of them an excellent foundation for a shooting script.[1] In short synopsis, *The Emigrants,* Part I, pictures the years of deprivation in a stony province of Sweden, mid-nineteenth century, that led to emigration, first by parcels of small farmers who boldly took a chance, later, during the "hunger years," by a mass exodus. The nuclear group in the Moberg-Troell epic is composed of Karl Oskar Nilsson, his wife and young brother Robert, a local whore and a free-wheeling minister with his family and friends. Chronologically, the action spans the pre-conditions, the painful leavetaking, the journey out, the crossing of the ocean (the real seasick terror), wide-eyed arrival in the Promised Land, the way west by train and riverboat, the staking out of Karl Oskar's claim in Minnesota territory. *The Settlers* resumes the Nilsson battle to survive and prosper, the laborious years and the closing chapters—from harvest to headstone. An interlude, the most powerfully styled section of the seven-hour narrative, crystallizes the flight of Robert to distant fields, more golden if not greener, he believes, his return from California's badlands, a broken youth with haunted face and fatally bleeding ear; his quiet death in the autumn woods, every leaf gleaming like the gold pieces he never lived to enjoy. At the end, everyone we've met is dead save Karl Oscar, still a "Swede," bitterly rocking himself into old age with dimming memories of his bride, Kristina, resolving never to forgive God who has taken from him the last solace. Scarcely a saga that lends itself to official glorification by mid-west pioneer societies! The sense of defeat and ashes is as pregnant as

1 *The Emigrants* is excessively over-rated by Swedish literary critics; they receive it as if Tolstoi, or for that matter Sigrid Undset, Knut Hamsun and Haldor Laxness, had never existed. Moberg is an honest regional taleteller, a chronicler; not an artist.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that of hope and a brave new world. True, the emigrants have secured a foothold, they have *dug in;* their children will be Americans and the inglorious blistering efforts that bred their future will be forgotten or turned into smörgås-table oratory. For me, the Swedish settlement of the American midwest has long been one of the great boring subjects, but Troell's magnificent reconstruction transmutes the all-too-familiar recitals. And though I thought I wanted never again to watch Max von Sydow and Liv Ullmann perspiring their way from cradles to graves, I'll concede they are both unqualifiedly impressive in this film. My withers were wrung.

Between Moberg's *The Emigrants* and Troell's, the difference—in the most essential and in the most glorious sense—is the difference that separates decent prose from incandescent poetry. There are five intercut sequences in *The Settlers,* for which no substantial scenario is supplied in Moberg's pages, flashbacks that disclose the stages of Robert's tragic quest for gold. They are *silent,* accentuated feverishly by a percussive rhythm, derived from a hopeful moment when Robert and his fat, fated friend drum their good spirits on a nugget-pan slung from a mule. These sequences, probably 45 minutes all told, are unequalled in kind since—shall we say since Von Stroheim's *Greed*? Robert's personal fate monopolizes our interest in much of *The Settlers.* The boy has a greater range of emotion to register than anyone but Kristina and he is played with extraordinary comprehension and upsetting charm by Eddie Axberg who is also (and this says something about Swedish film-making) a sound technician on the film. *The Emigrants* is in fact so dense with memorable thematic moments, tempting the critic to run paragraph-amok, one might well call the experience overloaded. I am personally prejudiced in favor of Troell's prodigality—it's so un-Swedish!—and there's not a single chain of images I'd want to sacrifice. Two episodes near the end of the film are especially worth relaying, to prevent the skeptic who hasn't seen a foot of Troell's work from fearing that he's in for an exercise that smugly tempers the wind to the shorn lamb. One hot noon a handful of starving Indians, very casually, on foot—no whooping warcries or circling mustangs—wipe out a settler's family. They shoot the men and cut open the pregnant woman; the knife descends to her mounted belly as she lies on the table where the Indians have pinned her and in the next shot we see an embryo nailed to the outside of the house. A military execution follows when, on a frost-bitten winter's day, thirty-eight of the insurgent Sioux are hanged on a platform scaffold in a forest clearing. The camera stands middle distance. The Indians file to their death, singing a dirge; each is placed on a trapdoor, hands tied behind, a noose around his neck and a hood pulled over his head. Quick sequence: a military tattoo, the flash of a falling sabre severing the line that releases all the traps simultaneously; brief cut to a rearing horse—glaring eyeballs, steaming nostrils—then the camera

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

returns to mid-distance as the hooded Indians, silently suspended, twist on their ropes' ends and the snow begins to fall through the hushed and frigid air.

Like sheep running blindly towards a new shepherd, critics everywhere have been bleating that Bo Widerberg is the ranking successor to Bergman in Swedish film. On the distinction between sentimental and authentic painting, Rilke once wrote that the sentimentalist painted "I love this"—instead of painting "Here it is," so that the viewer must look carefully to see if in truth the painter *loved* the object or was *held* by it. Widerberg paints, "I love this." Troell, certainly a lover of many things, paints, "Here it is." Since consistency of character and talent is a rare circumstance, it's a pleasure to report exceptions here. Widerberg, who plays tough on the outside, is soft at the center, like his movies. He doesn't know who he is; he alters his persona for every interview and change of wind. Troell is a man for all seasons. His "sincerity" is not of the professional order. I have never met a film director who has remained so ineffaceably—and with such staggering modesty—himself. Luckily for Troell, his virtues are honored by those responsible for the practical job of undertaking his projects. Once Kenne Fant, president of SF, commits himself to a production, he never interferes thereafter. If the director fouls up his own movie, he does so independently; if he produces a masterpiece, such as Troell's, this too is because his integrity has been respected from start to finish of the venture. The producer directly responsible for *The Emigrants* was Bengt Forslund, scarcely older than Troell; he's the only man at the "business end" of movies I've known who struck me as unreservedly honest. (I don't say there are no others; I only say that I've not known any!) More than that, he is creatively articulate and he has taste, which makes the more welcome his announcement that he will soon be directing films, himself.

While there may be many reasons that *The Emigrants* could have never been made in America—I mean as Troell made it!—the principal one is the incredible liberty allowed to Forslund which he in turn allowed to Troell (although it must have been some assurance that Troell had already made one outstanding film under his supervision and another which, if not great, was creditable) and, further, the beautiful unfussed efficiency with which this enterprise, on a heroic scale, was managed. No American production unit would ever be permitted by the unions to shoot a film with so small a working staff; it would be stuffed with assistant directors, "dialogue directors," advisors, apple-polishing lackeys (one for each limb of every actor), a gabble of grips, three script girls (two for the bed), maids for the actresses, stand-ins for the easily tiring stars, paymasters—you know the routine! If you *could* conceive of such a film made in U.S.A. by one man behind the camera, could you further imagine he'd be permitted to cut and mix his own film, without interference? They

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

left Troell on his own for ten months! When we talk about the craft of movie making, we need to include the coordinate factors: first the genius, then the compatible setting[2] . . . That Swedish society is otherwise stuffy and chilling is not contradicted by the ideal arrangement I have described; or rather, it is contradicted to the extent that the theatre world of Sweden is the single happy area in which unfriendly custom and envious levelling are disarmed by the reciprocities of art.

2. *Whorehouse in a Wilderness*

The American movie: what *is* at the heart of the matter? It can only "improve"—it *has*, technically, aesthetically and within a limited range of tone, assisted by actors among whom are fewer dummies than say fifteen years ago—it can only improve at the continuing cost of reaching lower and lower levels of consciousness. Professional surface, barbaric content. The same two months in which I saw a half-dozen critically popular American films, two of which are discussed below, offered me for unavoidable comparison not only *The Emigrants,* but also Bertolucci's *The Conformist* and four films-for-television: one from Poland, two from Hungary, one from BBC. Each of the TV films dealt with a private crisis. In one, something very simple and shattering happened to quite complex people; in the other three, something complex and equally shattering happened to essentially simple people. Inspired by diverse national and political backgrounds, they were commonly united by a commitment to the human scale; any one of them had finer nuances and a more worldly control of pathos than any American film release I can remember over several years. What chiefly struck me about the Bertolucci work (from a novel by Moravia), quite apart from its bizarre post-Antonioni treatment (perhaps a shade *too* mannered), was how much feeling for history it takes to translate the standard discharge of anti-social resentment into something more provocative and durable. When, ever, has an American film prosecuted a period and a type with such unmerciful intelligence as Bertolucci's tour de force of Italian fascism and its psychopathic ambience? (*Reflections in a Golden Eye* may have been the exceptional case and note how speedily Huston ducked out again to the exterior certainties of the love story and the manhunt.)

To argue plausibly, one doesn't expect from people interpretations of a special experience their culture doesn't provide. We *do* expect an

[2] Some statistics, for comparison with the American case. Production personnel for *The Emigrants:* 18 members. 20 actors, not counting 10 non-professional bit players. 500-odd extras. Initial plans called for 170 working days, 127 in Sweden, 43 in the U.S.A., excluding travelling time. 182 days were used. . . . Total consumption of film, 132,000 meters, from which 10,000 were edited. *Total cost* for the entire project: c. $1,400,000—a fifth, I'd venture, of what it would cost if financed by a Hollywood company. . . . By the way, the unnerving sea-storm scenes on the brig were shot in the studio, the *only* studio scenes except Robert's visit to the bordello in Part II. The Minnesota lake was located in south Sweden, the Manhattan shots were made in Copenhagen, the Indians were hanged just outside Stockholm.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

experience equal in force and the American film all too seldom supplies it; the tendency today, as I've said, is more than ever steadily downward in scale of values. Troell's film unarguably concerns itself with human beings at a low stratum of cognizance, yet those people have an irreducible decency; their efforts and their behaviour, even at its crudest, are in the service of an aspiration. What aspiration is being served in *Easy Rider, The Wild Bunch, Midnight Cowboy, Carnal Knowledge, McCabe and Mrs. Miller*? So much for the "new" American cinema, a proletarianized commodity in which the perspective contrived by the director is not simply at the level of his characters, it is considerably *below* the level of these characters! The typical American film director seems sado-masochistically bent on confronting us, no quarter allowed, with sub-social creatures whose form of converse is limited to sex at the rape level and profane outbursts of hostility which he expects us to receive as revolutionary criticism. The latest *en vogue* feature is filthy language, generously bestowed.

What, pray, is *McCabe and Mrs. Miller* all about? A cheap gambler and a dead shot builds a whorehouse in the Alaskan back-country, unwillingly shares his profits with an opium-eating whore who teaches him the window-dressing of his business and balks at being pushed around by the Big Company. "You sell out to us at our price or you get bumped off!" When he refuses their offer they set three gunmen on his tail; he kills them all and is himself killed; the film closes with snow enveloping alike the town and the dying McCabe, literally frozen in his tracks like a doll on a wedding cake, while Mrs. Miller, oblivious to the gaudy spectacle (fire in the church, the stalking and gunning), lies in an opium trance. Bret Harte used to boil up tripe like this, did he not? . . . . It's fable, *of course!* The usual pretentious lie. McCabe, with an outlaw's fame, turns out merely to have once killed a man in self-defense. All the same, he's an unerring marksman and what's more preposterous is his sputtering assertion when he feels too put upon by the Company and Mrs. Miller (from whom he wants breast-nuzzling love) that he's designed for better things. *"I'm a poet!"* he protests. This is surely the director speaking of his own person! Dishonest down the line: in the midst of a belching, greasy-haired, flannel-underwear community of lumber-camp backwash, Altman (the director) suddenly introduces a scrupulously clean, well-dressed Negro couple with no discernible function except the support of Altman's status as a liberal who agrees that black is beautiful. And could it have been mere coincidence that the most imposing man around, the six-and-a-half-feet tall heavy, speaks with an impeccable and plushy English accent—and is neatly shot between the eyes by our sawed-off, inarticulate American hero? . . . . Scenically, the film is set and mounted with loving care—the alpine-frontier location, claustrophobic and dripping, the dampened interior lighting,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the harsh weather: it rains throughout the film until the last reel when it snows without cessation to the end which gives the final sequence, the battle in the snow, a wonderfully grotesque postcard look. As usual, the effects deserved a more significant subject than that of building a whorehouse in the wilderness. Perhaps I've been slow to recognize a symbol for the provenance of Hollywood! . . . The most succinct comment on the film I've had reported to me was that of the Belgian Consul in Stockholm who, lured into seeing it by what arguments I don't know, announced afterward with prim acidity, "Je ne comprends pas la nécessité pour l'éxercise."

To insist that *The Emigrants* and *The French Connection* represent the beginning and end of the American pioneer dream is probably more fortuituous than persuasive. That dream was over decades ago. *The French Connection* (Phillip D'Antoni) is simply the latest brilliant-deadly example of how far you have entered "the post-Vergilian night" (Auden, of course). As a piece of action-film-making, it is expert, detached and savagely funny. The soundtrack accompaniments —including a sort of "score" like a desperate heart-flutter—are dazzling; the seedy urban wastes were chosen with a poet's eye; the chase under the El is a virtuoso passage, even of its not unusual kind. By anyone fit to read this magazine, the morality this adds up to shouldn't require a very subtle deciphering. Where Law has no virtue as a ruling principle, it will be inhumanly enforced; where social existence is a type of sewer where rats threaten to overwhelm all the other residents, the law's agents *had better be inhuman,* since everyone else is too invertebrate to accomplish the necessary exterminations. How much "social accusation" the author or director *intended* (their material was allegedly documented) is not worth arguing. This *is* show business, and show business in America rarely dabbles with inferences beyond the capacity of the dame on the street to analyze. A French film, currently on its rounds, *Un Condé (A Cop),* also features a police commissioner who takes law into his own hands, in this case when one of his men is needlessly killed by a hoodlum he has permitted to escape. French society was shocked, I gather, by the alarming probabilities the film depicted: power gone wild. Yet the ultimate subject of this film is a man's plagued conscience, for the commissioner, played with beautiful bitterness by Michel Bouquet, is not a criminal *manqué* (like Doyle); he is a sensitive professional outraged by a betrayal of tacit agreements between foxes and jackals. *The French Connection* has no ultimate subject, unless, as I've hinted above, it's the same implied one which we can superimpose on a hundred and one American films.

A BBC critic, discussing *The French Connection* and groping to avoid the worn-out analogy, concluded, "Well, let's say that New York is like *the last five minutes* of the Roman Empire!" *Quand même,* Rome is a flattering epithet. You might more modestly settle for Carthage.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

CHARLES W. MILLARD

Mondrian

—For Maxim

MONDRIAN'S EARLIEST STYLE WAS NOT FAR REMOVED from that developed by Mauve and the Hague school some twenty to thirty years previously, and for the first ten years of his career, until roughly 1900, he produced compositions worked out in a somber and narrow tonal range which depended largely on black, brown, and dark greens and purples. His motif was principally landscape which, treated with this almost monochrome palette, became as solid, opaque, and unatmospheric a subject as Van Gogh had made of it when he had worked in a similar style. Despite that fact, one is struck by how different in effect Mondrian's canvases are from those of Van Gogh, not only in the beginning but throughout his career. For a Dutch artist who began painting about 1890, and for whom Van Gogh must therefore have been or become the principal artistic fact of life, this surely evidences a conscious effort of avoidance and a protective determination to assert one's individuality at all costs. Such assertion was to characterize Mondrian's work for the first twenty-five years of his career, the period during which he experimented with most of the major movements of his time. In 1901, for example, one sees him composing a quintessentially Cézannesque subject, a still life with apples, a plate, and a ginger pot, in a wholly un-Cézannesque way by isolating each pictorial element. The background wall which defines the picture's shallow space is clearly distinguished from the cloth-covered table of the foreground, while the elements of the still life itself are carefully separated from both wall and table and from each other. Nothing could be compositionally less like Cézanne than the way in which the ginger pot anchors the left end of the still life, that in which the marshalled apples define its lateral extent, or that in which the severe arc of the plate embraces the other less geometrical forms.

In the early years of the twentieth century Mondrian gave himself to a geometricized Dutch version of Art Nouveau style in which liquid shapes, perhaps developed under the impact of his work in watercolor, melted into one another, usually establishing two large tonal areas, a dark foreground and a light background. Some element of the composition (mill, tree, etc.) inevitably reached to the top of the canvas to lock dark and light areas together, and not infrequently Mondrian resorted to backlighting, especially evening half-light and moonlight, to suppress the atmospheric effect naturally suggested by his light backgrounds. Up to this point, color had played a minor role in Mondrian's work, but beginning about 1907-08 he seems to have fallen un-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

der the influence of Fauvism, and in the latter year he painted several pictures in which color at high intensity combined with a fat and obvious paint application to produce a style not dissimilar from that of Munch. This similarity is especially noticeable in a picture such as *Devotion,* in which the art nouveau arabesques of the brushwork, the figure's flowing hair, and the unexplained juxtaposition of girl and flower, a recurrent image for Mondrian at this time, combine into a vaguely symbolist configuration of a sort not untypical of the Norwegian master. Mondrian continued to explore this Fauve-Art Nouveau avenue for two or three years, using both a broad, liquid touch and a more discrete, tachiste application, and favoring particularly a blue-orange color combination. *Church at Zoutelande* of 1909-10 is almost entirely worked out in these colors, the orange of the church facade forming the coloristic equivalent of the dark foreground tonality of the earlier landscapes, and the blue sky that of the lighter backgrounds. The intensity of the color and obviousness of the paint application maintain the opacity formerly assisted by location of the light source.

In 1911, Mondrian painted a curious triptych that seems both an artistic and personal summa, the production of which probably freed him for the work of his maturity. The fact that he chose a traditional religious form for this work is in itself indicative of its importance to him, as is its title, *Evolution.* Each panel of the triptych represents a woman and a stylized flower, the figures worked out in the angular and elongated contours of the Art Nouveau, and the total conception is as close as Mondrian ever came to the work of his countryman Toorop. The color pattern is not far from the blue-orange of the previous years, in this case two panels of blue-yellow and one of blue-red. While the work is too contrived and too programmatic to rank among Mondrian's best productions, it is the sort of ambitious effort which must have had immense personal importance for its creator. In certain ways, most notably the thin and modulated Cézannesque paint application, it points toward what lay immediately ahead for him.

Mondrian's final and decisive encounter with a contemporary style not of his own devising was with Cubism. In 1911-12 he painted several pictures clearly derived from Analytical Cubism yet, as with all his work, clearly his own. One sees in these pictures the Cubist linear web combined with a modulated monochrome ground applied in small strokes which add together to form larger areas. In Mondrian's pictures, however, the ground is in no way atmospheric, as in true Cubism, and the linear structure functions as edge and not as open armature. The resulting density is wholly in keeping with Mondrian's sensibility from the start and, indeed, these Cubist variations are closer in feeling to his earliest work than anything he had done for years. Throughout 1912 Mondrian continued to experiment with Cubist-derived forms, his web-like structures becoming smaller-scaled, denser and even less orthodox as certain neutral colors, principally grayed

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

blues and ochres, appeared. Large curving shapes further distinguished Mondrian's compositions from those of French Cubism. These were generally naturalistic references to trees, a subject which had occupied him for about three years and which eased his way into Cubism by providing ready-made linear structures standing out against neutral backgrounds. For the next several years Mondrian played with these linear patterns. In painting he tended to use bounded square forms filled in with color, rather than less distinct forms behind which color led an independent life, as in Klee's Cubist experiments. In drawing, his patterns were more open, tending to resolve themselves into cross shapes carefully juxtaposed. Probably because drawing is traditionally a less ambitious medium than painting, and hence put Mondrian less on his guard, the drawings clung to vestiges of representation (church facades, etc.) longer than the paintings. Finally, about 1916-17, Mondrian reached the threshold of his mature style in a series of canvases using color squares and/or rectilinear patterns drawn in black. Because their pictorial elements are seldom attached to the edges of the canvas, and because the background against which they are seen is always dense and hence the forms do not float but are held taut across the surface, these pictures have a staccato rhythm, vital to both their organization and their visual effect, to which Mondrian was to return at the very end of his life. For the moment, he tightened his compositions by enlarging their rectilinear patterns, attaching them firmly to the edges of the canvas, and filling in the resulting squares with red, blue, yellow, or shades of white. Because the color squares were entirely contained by the black grid their overall effect was less noticeably rhythmical and more serene than that of the immediately preceding pictures. Mondrian combatted the danger of mechanical lifelessness by experimenting with diamond-shaped canvasses and by increasing the intensity of his colors, as well as by augmenting the variety of his pictorial elements by reducing their size and increasing their number. Finally, however, he seems to have realized that the pictorial effect he sought was one of increased rather than diminished scale and of fewer rather than more elements, and he began to reduce the number of squares per canvas, increasing their size and varying their shapes and sizes to give them life. By 1920 he had devised a format in which long narrow rectangles bordered a central group of squarer shapes. Although the color variations of these elements mitigated against the smaller peripheral rectangles being read as a frame Mondrian apparently felt constrained by them for he soon developed a different and more satisfactory format. By 1921, all but two or three of the ordering grid lines stopped short of the edge of the canvas, while the square and rectilinear shapes distributed themselves more freely about the composition. The former device allowed the pictures to breathe more freely, the latter integrated them more completely by de-localizing shape, that

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

is, by discouraging the identification of particular shapes with particular parts of the canvas.

The next step taken by Mondrian, and the one which led him to the basic format with which he was to be occupied throughout the 1920's, was in the direction of purification. He reduced his color areas in size and banished them to the edges of the canvas. Because the white areas thus freed weighed less usually, this allowed him to reattach the black linear patterns to the canvas edges, something made more desirable by the anomalous edges between color areas at the points at which they were not controlled by the black grid. Having arrived at a satisfactory set of relationships among controlling grid lines and controlled white and colored areas, Mondrian was faced with another problem. Because his color areas were spaced around the periphery of the canvas, one's eye tended to skip from one to another, making the entire composition rotate around its open center, which thus functioned as a kind of image. Since Mondrian's pictorial development had been consistently away from imagery, he found it necessary to combat this effect, sometimes by eliminating color altogether and sometimes by using diamond-shaped canvasses (squares turned on end) which inhibited the eye from skipping from point to point around the edge. By these means, and by occasionally allowing the central white rectangle to run off the edge of the canvas and not be completely enclosed within it, Mondrian came closer to the stasis he seems to have sought, and which he always promoted by the use of neutral-shaped square or only slightly rectangular canvasses.

Having played a great many variations on his themes of the 1920's Mondrian began to take up new themes in the '30's. To overcome further any effect of centralized image, he ran lines through the centers of his canvasses, strapping them unequivocally to the edges. He also began to experiment with thinner lines put down in pairs, which led, in turn, to increasingly complicated grid patterns. These patterns were elaborated by shorter connecting lines not attached to the canvas edge, the total effect tending once again toward that of a vibrating rhythm of taut elements rather than toward the absolute rest of the previous years. As the complexity of the patterns increased, small color areas unbounded by black began to appear, until in the early 1940's Mondrian took the tremendously important unifying step of eliminating colored areas altogether in favor of colored lines. At first this was done so that the resulting grid was composed of both black and colored lines, but soon black was completely eliminated, resulting in an identification of controlling and controlled elements unique for their time. The one remaining problem was the effect of overlap where the colored grid lines crossed, which introduced ideas of depth antithetical to Mondrian's basic pictorial premises. In his last two pictures, *Broadway Boogie-Woogie* and *Victory Boogie-Woogie* of 1942-43, he solved

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

this problem by simply changing the color at each linear intersection, an idea no doubt also suggested to him by the visual "pop" caused by the whitish after-images at the intersections of the lines in the black grid pictures. The two boogie-woogie pictures pulse with a rhythmical visual life recalling that of the gridless canvasses of twenty-five years earlier, and they represent both a final synthesis of pictorial ideas their creator had been working with for half a century and a path for the future that testify to the substance of Mondrian's art.

If one is struck by the consistency of that art, by the absence of qualitative lapses throughout Mondrian's career, one is struck also by its relative lack of fire, the absence of the spark that would have bridged the gap between continuing high quality and brilliance. A clue to that puzzle is to be found in the almost obsessive single-mindedness with which Mondrian continued to purge his art. A more important clue is contained in what are in many ways his most beautiful and most personal works, the series of drawings and watercolors of flowers, mostly chrysanthemums, that he produced from the turn of the century through the 1920's. Soft and atmospheric, frequently worked out in pale blue and white wash with only a hint of drawn contour, sometimes carefully delineated in charcoal on bare white paper, these drawings, which form a separate, self-contained episode in Mondrian's career, speak of the need for an outlet less rigorously pure than that he allowed himself in his paintings. More important, they speak of forces unassimilated into the mainstream of his art which might, in Mondrian's own terms, have prettified it; but which might also, in absolute terms, have enriched it and raised it to the level it so often misses by so little. Only in his last two pictures is there some significant hint of what might have been produced by less resistance to this strain in his character, so clearly identified as feminine in the woman and flower image of the first years of the century. The difference between an art of first quality and one of such supreme quality as to be beyond qualitative distinctions is to be found in the number of things assimilated, not in the number rejected; and it is in realizing this that one touches on the major limitation to an artistic production otherwise so advanced, so substantial, and so well-founded.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

B. H. HAGGIN

Music and Ballet Chronicle

THE LONDON SYMPHONY'S FIRST CONCERT in the Carnegie Hall International Festival of Visiting Orchestras made me newly aware of the continued inclusion in the standard concert repertory of rubbish that should have been eliminated long ago. This is not for lack of enough good music to fill the programs: most of Haydn's last and greatest symphonies, most of his many superb string quartets, almost all of his fascinating piano sonatas, most of Mozart's greatest piano concertos, his best quartets, his great string quintets, almost all of the many individual and delightful quartets and quintets of Boccherini, most of Schubert's great piano sonatas and string quartets go unperformed year after year. There is, then, no need of the rubbish of Liszt and Rachmaninov which pianists perform, and to which even someone with Ashkenazy's distinguished musical taste has devoted large parts of his recent recitals. And whereas one would have been grateful if for his appearance with the London Symphony he had substituted for Mozart's familiar Concerto K.466 one of the infrequently heard masterpieces of the genre like K.453 or 450 or 482 or 491, one was appalled by his substitution of Rachmaninov's Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini. As a pianist Rachmaninov had a style that was excitingly incisive and dramatic; as a composer for the piano he thought largely in terms of that exciting playing style; and in the works for piano and orchestra one hears trashy writing that achieves such excitement, in alternation with third-rate melodic writing that rises to sobbing climaxes from which it falls away with retrospective yearning. Moreover, after the Rhapsody there was an hour more of the Symphony No. 2 without even the relief of pianistic excitement. And before the Rhapsody there were only the noisily empty gestures of William Schuman's *American Festival* Overture, which made the concert musically unrewarding from first note to last. What gave it interest was the performances—first the perfectly balanced, and therefore clear-textured and beautiful-sounding playing that Andre Previn got the superb orchestra to do with Ashkenazy, as against the unbalanced, muddy and raucous playing that Barenboim produced with the same orchestra for Ashkenazy's performances of Rachmaninov concertos a few years ago. And one heard not only superb orchestral playing but impressive musical taste in Previn's pacing and shaping of the symphony. This taste was evident again in his performance of Brahms's Fourth at the second concert—in its steadiness for the most part, as against the usual changes of tempo. I say for the most part because there was one important exception:

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the setting of a tempo more deliberate and less effective than the prescribed *Allegro energico e passionato* for the opening of the passacaglia finale, with a change to the correct faster tempo at the return of the opening statement after the solemn variation for the brass. The rest of the program was poor: Walton's *Scapino* Overture, and Sibelius's Violin Concerto, which had fine small-scale playing by Kyung Wha Chung.

The infrequently heard Mozart Concerto K.453 that I mentioned earlier was performed by young Murray Perahia with the New York Philharmonic under Kertesz. I had been alternately impressed and disappointed by Perahia's performances in the past; but I was impressed by what the acoustical deficiencies of Philharmonic Hall let me hear of his performance of the concerto this time. I had an excellent seat in row Z of the parquet; and the sound of the orchestra in the first-rate performance of Berlioz's *Corsair* Overture that opened the concert was very fine; but when the brass played *forte* I could barely hear the violins; and similarly when the orchestra played in the first movement of the concerto—a supreme example of Mozartian instrumental high comedy—I could barely hear the piano (though I did hear that Perahia occasionally fell into the common mistaken practice in Mozart-playing of not sustaining the force of a phrase to the end, but letting it drop to a concluding whisper). In the Andante—one of Mozart's most extraordinarily organized and most affecting utterances—Perahia's powerfully phrased delivery of the piano's declamatory statements were more clearly audible; and this was true also of much of his playing in the variation finale—above all the piano's wonderful variation in minor.

My point about repertory—chamber music repertory this time—was illustrated again by Ashkenazy's sonata recital with Itzhak Perlman at Hunter College. Beethoven's Op. 30 No. 2, possibly the most frequently played of his violin sonatas, is certainly not rubbish; but it is as certainly inferior to the never-played Nos. 1 and 3; and one would expect Ashkenazy to recognize this and perform one of these others; but he performed No. 2. Worse still, he performed Prokofiev's Sonata Op. 80, which struck me, after an interval of many years, as mostly arid stuff—what a friend once characterized as "Prokofiev's wall-to-wall music." That left Mozart's Sonata K.378 as the one first-rate work of the program. But Ashkenazy's subtle musical perception and beautiful playing of the piano, which he kept in unfailing relation to the simple lyrical playing of Perlman, not only made the Mozart sonata an exciting experience but were a pleasure to hear even in the Beethoven.

It was the Guarneri Quartet—though it has yet to begin to deal adequately with Haydn and Mozart—that performed Schubert's seldom-heard Quartet Op. 29 a couple of years ago, and this year performed the even greater and more seldom-heard Op. 161 at the 92nd Street YM-YWHA. The group has a tendency toward slow

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tempos; and for the wonderful opening movement its *allegro molto moderato* was so *molto moderato* as to make one more aware of the Schubertian redundancies than the correctly paced Budapest Quartet recorded performance does; but the musical progression in that tempo was coherent and superbly effective, and by itself the movement was a success. But it was followed by a movement whose *andante* tempo was not *un poco moto,* and, worse still, by a finale in a leisurely lilting tempo instead of the *allegro assai* Schubert requests; and so one was left with the impression of a slowing down of the entire work. On the other hand the group's tempo for the driving fugal *perpetuum mobile* of Beethoven's Op. 59 No. 3 still seemed to me too fast for clear articulation of the substance; but the execution was dazzlingly brilliant, and one couldn't imagine the earlier movements being done better.

The great singing Janet Baker did at her Hunter College recital—in which the beautiful vocal sound that emerged seemingly without human effort was deployed in the phrase with unfailing musical intelligence and taste—was done in some unfamiliar songs of Mahler and Schubert that I found uninteresting, in addition to the familiar Schumann *Frauenliebe und Leben* that I find mawkish, and songs of Fauré that continue not to engage my mind. But even in these the Baker operation left one happy to have experienced it. And the one really great song on the program, Schubert's *Nacht und Träume,* she dealt with in an unusual manner, imparting sustained tension to the long phrases that were held to a dream-like *pianissimo* from first to last.

The first time I heard Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande*—performed in New York by the Chicago Opera with Mary Garden as Mélisande in 1918—a man standing next to me exclaimed during the first intermission, "Where are the arias?!"; and after the first tower scene he moaned, "Oh, what Puccini would have done with that!" I'm content not to hear the arias Puccini would have written; what I miss is the first-rate melodic writing of someone like Berlioz (since the opera in question is French) that would hold my attention and enable me to ignore the Maeterlinck play as I do the dramatic action of *Il Trovatore* or *Aida;* and I find intolerably boring the five acts of monotonous recitative that only rarely attains expressiveness. Certainly I recognize the marvelous orchestral writing; but I recognize too that it is writing for the play and recitative which have to be taken with it; and some of the best of it is the interludes between scenes, when the bored audience finds relief in talking. All this made me inclined to skip the Metropolitan's new production of *Pelléas;* but the enthusiastic report and urging of the young critic Harris Green persuaded me to go; and it turned out to be something I'm glad I didn't miss. Having mentioned the orchestral writing as the one valuable element in the work, I begin with the superb realization of it in all its subtlety and occasional splendor by Colin Davis with

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the excellent Metropolitan Orchestra. Before the performance began I was struck by the beauty of the forecurtain even in the lighted theater; when the theater was darkened the forecurtain turned out to be one of several scrims whose rising revealed the first scene—scrims made of a translucent fabric which reflected light; and with this fabric and Rudolph Kuntner's lighting Desmond Heeley created a number of scenes of extraordinary beauty and atmospheric effect—two exceptions being the vaults below the castle and the bedchamber of the last act. In these scenes one saw the stage action devised by Paul-Emile Deiber that was remarkable in the economy of the means which achieved impressive dramatic significance, and that included an effective innovation in the additional significant movement which prolonged a few of the scenes into the beginning of the orchestral interlude (with the incidental beneficial result that the audience remained silent during those moments of the interludes). In this stage action one saw evidence not only of Deiber's skill but of the gifts of the performers he had worked with. And with full appreciation of the major contributions of Thomas Stewart's Golaud and Barry McDaniel's Pelléas and the lesser ones of Giorgi Tozzi's Arkel and Lili Chookasian's Geneviève, I consider the outstanding and overwhelming contribution to have been Judith Blegen's Mélisande, one of the most extraordinary things I have seen achieved on the stage of an opera house. I have seen dancers use their bodies with expressive effect, but never an opera singer whose body even when motionless presented the compelling image, and in movement exercised the powerful dramatic effect, that Blegen's did—whose mere turning of her head had the expressive force Blegen's had, or whose darting now this way, now that in a desperate attempt to escape Golaud's inexorable grasp wrung one's heart as hers did. With her few quiet movements in the early scenes, her desperate ones in the scenes of Golaud's brutality, she created a Mélisande who was believable, convincing, agonizing—what no one had succeeded in doing before in my experience, and least of all the Mary Garden of 1918 with her mannered flutterings and self-conscious posturings. Thus it turned out that an opera of little interest for me provided one of the rare occasions when the work together of designer, director, conductor, singers and orchestra achieved a notable example of the combined artistic operation of operatic performance.[1]

[1] By now it's no surprise to find Winthrop Sargeant calling the new *Pelléas* "a great disappointment," disliking the Heeley scenery, describing the Deiber staging as "fussy beyond belief," and contending that Colin Davis "hasn't as yet the slightest conception of the subtleties of the score"; for he has amply demonstrated his lack of critical perception and taste in the past. But remembering his invariable approval of the staging of old operas like *La Traviata* and *Carmen* by Frank Corsaro and Tito Capobianco that has inflicted on them atrocious innovations which would horrify Verdi and Bizet, one was astounded by his objection to the use of one of the interludes for pantomime of Pelléas and Mélisande, which he said "is uncalled for and certainly did not originate in the mind of Debussy."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Donizetti's *Maria Stuarda,* a less impressive work than his *Lucrezia Borgia,* was produced by the New York City Opera for its star coloratura soprano Beverly Sills; but unfortunately it turned out that her voice had deteriorated since last year to the point of being harshly tremulous and grainy even in the quiet melodic writing in which it had previously been steady and agreeable; so that her singing of the title role in the three scenes of the last act got to be nerve-wracking. Pauline Tinsley, the soprano who sang Queen Elizabeth, has a voice which, though well past its prime, is steady and agreeable, and which she used impressively. John Stewart, the Leicester, has a tenor voice of good quality but without the power one was glad he didn't strain to achieve. More damaging was the lack of power in Charles Wilson's conducting; but the production had acceptable sets by Ming Cho Lee and costumes by Jose Varona, and staging by Tito Capobianco that was free of his usual outrageous innovations until the very last moment, where one didn't merely see Maria walk to her execution on the arm of Talbot but was made to see her place her head on the block and the executioner prepare his axe for its fall.

I happen not to have seen any of Tennessee Williams's plays, and don't know whether the original action of *Summer and Smoke* fleshed out with his own dialogue would have seemed to me dramatically plausible and effective, as Lanford Wilson's libretto for the new opera of Lee Hoiby did not. But in an opera the fleshing out of the action that makes it plausible and effective is done by dramatically expressive music; and though one heard words being sung to musical sounds—which was evidence for Hoiby that he had composed an opera, and for the captive subscription audience that it was hearing one—I didn't hear in the endless succession of sounds to which the words were being sung even one phrase that had relevant expressive point in the dramatic situation or any intrinsic interest or value in itself. In this it was exactly like Hoiby's earlier *Natalia Petrovna,* which the company had produced in 1965; and thus it was still another in the long series of worthless American operas on which the company has persisted in wasting its financial and artistic resources and its audiences' money and time, in accordance with the erroneous belief that one must produce bad American operas to get the eventual good one. I remind the company that the one valuable American opera it produced in 1954 (and perversely hasn't presented again since then), Copland's *The Tender Land,* was not in any way related or indebted to the worthless American operas that preceded it.

What made Hoiby harder to endure was the overwhelming demonstration of real creative power that had been provided only a few days earlier by a five-hour concert performance of Berlioz's *The Trojans.* The conductor, John Nelson, was someone I had never even heard of; and I was therefore unprepared for the mastery of the work and of his performing forces that he revealed in a performance

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

astounding not only in itself but in the effect it gave to the music. A year ago, reporting on a performance of passages from the first two acts, I said these were the less interesting acts of a work that was not, as had been claimed recently, Berlioz's greatest. For me his greatest was the incandescently beautiful writing in parts of *Romeo and Juliet, The Damnation of Faust, Harold in Italy, Les Nuits d'Eté;* and in *The Trojans* the one example of such writing was the septet of Act 4. What I discovered this time was that in addition to the great writing of that kind Berlioz produced great writing of another kind—the grandly eloquent dramatic writing for voice and orchestra that one hears in *The Trojans.* And the attention that was seized at the beginning by the powerfully expressive passage of the low strings leading to Cassandra's first recitative was held thereafter by the operation of a mind that was at every moment active in response to the situation and word. Nor was it only I who heard this, but an audience which completely filled Carnegie Hall (I was able to hear the performance only through the kindness of a friend with an extra ticket); which didn't indulge in the usual indiscriminate and prolonged screaming after arias, but applauded perceptively at other places too and stopped applauding when the conductor wanted to go on; which stayed until the end, a little after midnight, and then stayed on to applaud and cheer; and which—after deserved ovations for Clarice Carson, the Cassandra, Richard Cassilly, the Aeneas, and Evelyn Lear, the Dido—revealed its understanding of the conductor's achievement by giving him the biggest ovation of all. In every way, then, it was the most notable musical occasion in many years.

People have occasionally exclaimed to me: "Why did Balanchine . . ." or "Why doesn't Balanchine . . ." do this or that; and I have had to say: "I don't know." I am myself, on occasion, unable to understand his doing what he has done, or even what he has said about what he has done; in my years of watching and occasionally listening I have acquired no knowledge of the working of his mind that is responsible for what he does and says; and in this situation I do the only thing I can do, which is to describe what he presents to my eye on the stage and say what I think about it.

Thus, I can offer no explanation of Balanchine's basing a ballet on a Pan Am radio jingle, and his using in it the bad music by Roger Kellaway and the ugly costumes of Irene Sharaff; I can only say that having at last seen *PAMTGG* in January, I found that it confirmed Harris Green's statement, in a letter after the première I missed last June, that even with its faults and inadequacies it didn't deserve the treatment it had got from Clive Barnes. As against Barnes's excoriation of everything in the piece, Green mentioned the costume which made Karin von Aroldingen "look particularly ghastly" but "liked

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

her *pas de deux* with Ohman." And I discovered that the ensemble activity of the badly costumed airplane pilots, stewardesses and ground crews provided a context for three *pas de deux* of the soloists —the classical *pas de deux* of Gelsey Kirkland and Earle Sieveling; the powerful night-club-style number, to a blues, of von Aroldingen and Jean-Pierre Bonnefous; and the fast and tricky Latin-American-style number of Sara Leland and John Clifford; and that while the ensembles were a mere competent filling out of time, the *pas de deux* showed the unique Balanchine powers of invention for a girl and boy dancing together to be undiminished. All three were excellent in their different ways; and the second was outstanding.

Nor—to come to this year's new productions—do I understand Balanchine's staging Fokine's *Chopiniana* (better known by its later name *Les Sylphides*) in the way he did. There occurs to me the statement attributed to Hindemith—that music had a face; and if one didn't like it one shouldn't play it; but if one played it one shouldn't change it. The original Fokine work that Balanchine promised—what, in his book about the great ballets, he calls "the second production," presented in St. Petersburg on April 6, 1908, and later presented in Western Europe by Diaghilev—had a face: the face of a romantic ballet performed "in the light of the moon" by "dancers in long white dresses"—dresses whose flow and swirl was part of what one saw as the dancers' leaps and turns. If Balanchine didn't like that face—didn't like the romantic moonlight and long white dresses—he shouldn't have produced the work; if he produced it he shouldn't have changed it. The movements that were performed in short practice costumes like those of *Concerto Barocco* were not the movements of Fokine's *Chopiniana;* they were the movements of what the program note described as a "recension . . . offered . . . as a testimony of approximate efficiency in a context of its contemporary vitality," and what looked as skeletal and unattractive as that note suggested. (The mere removal from the Fokine work of the encrustation of sixty years' changes, corruptions and "layers of sentiment or sentimentality" that "have tended to dull the force, logic and ingenuity of this academic masterpiece" would have produced not the seemingly desirable restoration of the original one would expect, but, according to the note, "a pious museum restoration" which the pejorative "pious" and "museum" made unthinkable for stage presentation.)

But Fokine's work wasn't changed only by being performed in practice costumes; it was changed also by being performed by the particular dancers in those practice costumes. At a rehearsal for an out-of-town performance once I saw Violette Verdy, in thick, fuzzy rehearsal tights, make the arabesques and turns of the slow middle section of the C-sharp-minor Waltz excitingly grand with the way her large movements filled out time and space. But Balanchine, in his production, chose to have the Waltz performed by Kay Mazzo,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

who had repeatedly demonstrated her lack of the ability to fill out time and space with such impressive movements in supported adagios; and the practice costume exposed and accentuated this inadequacy, as it did also the excessive size of von Aroldingen's body. Many of the questions about Balanchine have concerned dancers: it has been difficult to understand his assigning dancers to roles they clearly were unsuited for, his not assigning to roles the dancers who seemed predestined for them. *Chopiniana* raised such questions: why Mazzo was assigned to a role which required her to do what she had clearly demonstrated in *Diamonds* and *Don Quixote* she could not do; and why the role was not given to the dancer who had repeatedly demonstrated in breathtaking fashion her ability to do the very thing Mazzo couldn't do—Verdy. And young Lorca Massine's new ballet, *Printemps,* raised further questions: why a dancer with Verdy's outstanding endowment of technique and style, which Balanchine had recognized in what he had devised for her to do in *Liebeslieder Walzer,* the Tchaikovsky *Pas de Deux, Emeralds, La Source,* was made to waste these gifts in a worthless piece by an apprentice choreographer whose first ballet, *Four Last Songs,* had demonstrated his lack of the slightest talent for choreography worth the dancers' labor and the audiences' attention.

Difficult to understand also were Balanchine's additional changes in *Don Quixote* this year, which damaged the scene in the village square this time. The rising curtain revealed not the villagers who used to perform a perversely accented folk-style dance, but von Aroldingen and Peter Martins with a group of girls in ballet costume, who danced *Pas Classique Espagnol.* It was a good ballet piece, with an outstandingly fine solo for Martins; but as a ballet piece it had no dramatic relevance, was danced to some additional atrocious music by Nicolas Nabokov ("Why does Balanchine . . . ?"), and, with a new belly dance, necessitated the omission of the sinister beggars' dance in which Don Quixote used to get absurdly involved. On the other hand, the marvelous *Pas de Deux Mauresque* in Act 2, in which Suki Schorer used to dance with piquant charm, was electrifyingly pointed up by Gelsey Kirkland's extraordinary clarity and sharpness. Nor was this the only or most impressive achivement of her special kind: the same clarity in the movements that seemed merely to come into existence in their unfailing perfection, as if human effort were not involved, made hers the most remarkable performance of the lead role in *Concerto Barocco*—and in particular the second movement's supported adagio—that I could remember.

But it was two older dancers who provided several of the season's great occasions—the performances of *La Source* in which Verdy and Villella danced with the security and ease acquired in their numerous performances of the piece throughout the country. Again I found it difficult to believe I was really seeing the flow of beautiful and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

elegant movement that Verdy was producing with effortless perfection; and again I marvelled at Villella's recently acquired use of his power to achieve the relaxed elegance of his solos. And another great occasion was the *Raymonda Variations* with similar movement by Verdy, and Helgi Tomasson's flawless partnering and his solos that had a beautiful clarity of outline in their contained brilliance.

As for the questions people ask in their annoyance at the increased cluttering up of the programs with the pretentious and empty works of Jerome Robbins, I continue to think Balanchine, recognizing the gifts that produced *Afternoon of a Faun* and *Les Noces,* feels obligated to give Robbins the opportunity to exercise those gifts, even though they produce works I cannot imagine Balanchine respecting—like the latest of them, *Watermill.* "And he takes forever" were the concluding words of Verdy's description to an interviewer of Jerome Robbins's way of working with dancers, as against Balanchine's. These words about the rehearsals apply also to the completed pretentious ballets—whether the forever is the 80 or 90 minutes of constant movement of *Goldberg Variations* or the 60 minutes of *Watermill* in which the comparatively little that is done is magnified by the enormous slowness of the doing. Waiting for it to begin, I read in the program that Teiji Ito's score stemmed "mainly from religious ceremonial and theatrical music of the Orient," and that among other instruments it employed the Shakuhachi, "a bamboo flute used in the 13th Century in Japan . . . mainly by Zen Buddhist priests whose [surviving] compositions . . . usually are contemplative evocations of nature and the seasons." I could understand, then, the statement "The ballet itself is influenced by the music and theatre of the East," but was baffled, after this, by the statement "However its world, people and events are not construed as Oriental"; and the bafflement was not removed later by the world, the people and the events in the ballet that *were* seemingly Oriental. But this wasn't all that I found unclear in the ballet.

The small group of instrumentalists began to produce tinkly, wispy sounds; the curtain rose on a completely dark stage; and after a couple of minutes there gradually became visible three tall constructions of long tufted stalks, a sliver of new moon, and a single black-cloaked figure standing with back to audience. For a few minutes this figure remained motionless; then slowly, slowly, slowly it turned toward the audience, revealing the face of Villella, who for another few minutes stood motionless again, looking, looking, looking into space, then slowly, slowly, slowly turned back toward the moon. What I recall next is Villella moving slowly, slowly, slowly to the right, stopping, slowly casting off his cloak, facing the audience in his black shirt and trousers and sandals, slowly withdrawing one bare foot, then the other from the sandals, slowly pulling the shirt over his head and tossing it away, slowly removing the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

trousers and flinging them toward the shirt, and facing the audience, finally, naked except for the male dancer's supporter. He had been seen similarly naked in Balanchine's *Prodigal Son,* but in a dramatic situation, after his despoilment by his companions; and attention had been held by the movements wonderfully imagined by Balanchine for that situation; whereas now in *Watermill* there was no evident reason for his nakedness, and for several minutes he did nothing but stand motionless, looking, looking, looking into space, and presenting for the spectator to see only the beauty of his body. This was difficult enough for him to carry off; but there was in addition one curious detail: whereas in *Prodigal Son* the despoiled Villella had been left with a purplish loincloth, in *Watermill* he was left not similarly with a bit of theatrical costume, but with the supporter that is never seen, and that, being seen now, drew attention to itself. That Villella did carry it off with an appearance of unselfconsciousness in his quiet projection of strength and dignity was evidence of powers which deserved better employment than they were given in this ballet.

My next recollection (I cannot recall everything; nor does this seem necessary) is of Villella still standing motionless and looking out into space, seemingly oblivious of the boys who entered from both sides with what looked to me like colored balloons (but to someone else like unlighted lanterns) at the ends of long poles, and who after a few minutes withdrew—all without any evident point in relation to Villella. Then, alone on the stage, he slowly, slowly, slowly made movements which showed his body in a number of beautiful configurations—after which he sank down to a sitting position in which he seemed lost in thought. It may have been in this position that he ignored the three or four successive groups of boys who trotted onto the stage and around it like the group of boys in the last movement of Balanchine's *Rubies,* and then trotted off. Then, for no evident reason, Villella began running as fast as he could across and off the stage, first from right to left, then from left to right, and after several such crossings suddenly came to a stop, facing a group but not communicating with it. Later, Villella, lying on the stage, shrank together in fear when a demon in the form of a ferocious animal attacked a boy who was similarly stretched out near him. Still later Villella remained either seated or stretched out on the right side of the stage as a girl, in a wide robe with her hair confined in a large headdress, entered on the opposite side, released her long hair from the headdress, shed her robe, and stretched out on her back in her black leotard; at which point a boy approached and bent over her, lifted her into his arms, and began with her a series of slow acrobatic involvements similar to those of the erotic *pas de deux* in Balanchine's *Bugaku.* The involvements ended with the two bodies in embrace rolling over two or three times, then separating and lying motionless. When, after a few moments, they began to rise, Villella began to rise

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

with them; and as the boy left the stage Villella approached the girl, entwined an arm with hers, and, sinking toward the stage, possibly laid his head in her lap (I'm not sure of this) before stretching out on the stage alone, apparently in sleep; whereupon the girl picked up her robe and left. Finally a few girls entered to engage in play with some of the long tufted stalks; and after a time Villella, rising, picked up two of the stalks dropped by the girls and began to manipulate them. Eventually he dropped them; and picking up his cloak and wrapping it around his body, he moved slowly, slowly, slowly off the stage as it slowly, slowly, slowly became completely dark and the curtain fell.

With the predictable roars and cheers of approval there were this time a few boos. And encountering Harris Green outside, I discovered that he had been one of the booers: "We now have the *ballet* of the absurd," he commented. (Irving Howe told me later that he had booed—something he said he had never done before.) But the next day we learned in Clive Barnes's review that the boos had come from the fools who hadn't appreciated "a fantastic ballet . . . that attempts to question the art of the ballet and, indeed, our concept of the theater" with its experiments with a theatrical time longer than realistic time, and that "seems to make a new statement about dance, rather in the way Vaslav Nijinsky tried in 'L'Après-Midi d'un Faune' many, many years ago"; the fools who hadn't recognized in the things they had thought meaningless a ballet concerned with "a man of mature years looking back on the patterns of his life and the shadows of his destiny." To this I, a man of mature years looking back on the *Faune* in which I saw Nijinsky in 1916, can reply that its new statement about dance was made in a way completely unlike Robbins's—in a singular work of art that was immediately clear and overwhelming in impact even for a spectator aged sixteen.

"A ballet that attempts to question the art of ballet"—a prime example of what for Mr. Barnes is impressive writing and thinking—became, in a Sunday article a week later, "not a ballet" but "a theaterpiece . . . performed by trained dancers." And this—which happened to be true of *Watermill*—didn't keep Mr. Barnes, a few paragraphs later in the article, from describing the work as "a ballet that extends ballet," which it couldn't be and do if it was "not a ballet" but "a theaterpiece . . . performed by trained dancers." Nor, it would seem to me, could ballet be extended by "a ballet that attempts to question the art of ballet." But one must keep in mind that in these pronouncements Mr. Barnes's concern was to sound impressive, not to make consistent sense, or any sense at all. And there was no sense in the pronouncements about Villella's performance—that although he was an extraordinary technician Villella, like Nijinsky and Bruhn, was "often at his best when faced with a theater rather than a dance"; that *Watermill* had provided in Villella's career the something new

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that *Petrushka* provided in Nijinsky's; and that his performance in it was "the finest thing he has done." I don't know what Villella thinks of what he is required to do in *Watermill* and won't embarrass him by asking; but I do know what it has meant to him as a dancer to have achieved, in his dancing, mastery of the special styles first of *Giselle,* then of *La Sylphide,* then of *La Source;* and I would doubt that he thinks standing and moving about naked with dignity for an hour amid the goings-on in *Watermill* is a greater achievement.

It was after the preceding comments on *Watermill* had been written that someone told me what had been said of it by an experienced non-professional spectator. "It was beautiful—the changing moon, and so on," she had said. "And it was empty: it was like a ritual, but a ritual without a doctrine"—which strikes me as a remarkable perception not only about *Watermill* but about the entire Robbins operation.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

STEPHEN FARBER

The Old Ultra-Violence

STANLEY KUBRICK'S *A Clockwork Orange* has aroused more passionate responses than it really deserves. Extravagantly praised by some critics, viciously condemned by others, the film has practically been lost in the surrounding controversy. Kubrick seems to have persuaded many people that he is a genius—perhaps because of the slow pace at which he now makes movies, the portentous subject matter he chooses (particularly in his last film, *2001: A Space Odyssey*), and his skill at self-promotion. He's undeniably talented, with some impressive achievements to his credit, but the word "genius" is absurd when applied to a director who is primarily an adapter, almost always working from interesting source material, and often with the help of very gifted collaborators. *A Clockwork Orange* follows Anthony Burgess' novel with almost slavish fidelity; the premise, the situations, much of the detail, and most of the dialogue are Burgess', and although Kubrick has brought something distinctive *to* the film, as he has to almost all his projects, it doesn't contain the originality of vision that could justify the adulation.

Some of the acclaim the film has received can probably be attributed to the slightly inflated reputation of Burgess' novel. The book is ingenious and entertaining, but I would suggest it is a *tour de force* rather than a lasting work of art. Taking off from a marvelous premise, it envisions a future society in which teenage hoodlums rule the streets at night, while a nervous government sponsors a psychological conditioning program as part of its desperate campaign for the Law and Order vote. The novel also features an astonishing literary conceit: It is a first-person narrative written in the slang of the teenage hero Alex—an invented language called nadsat.

Probably no novel so dependent on word play can be translated to film, but Kubrick has come closer than one might think possible. His visual style in the first third of the film is almost imaginative and startling enough to make up for the missing verbal style, and it provides the same kind of aesthetic distance that Burgess achieved through language. In reading the opening scenes of the book, which deal with Alex's life of sadism before his arrest, we are swept along by the strange, amusing prose, helplessly charmed even by the exultant descriptions of beatings and rape, only occasionally drawing back to be shocked by Alex's utter callousness, and by our own silent complicity in ultra-violence. Kubrick makes most of the right decisions to establish the same precarious balance between involvement and detach-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ment that Burgess was aiming for. In stylizing the violence, Kubrick enables us—no, forces us—to enjoy the imaginative way it is filmed (particularly in the beautifully choreographed fight with Billyboy's gang in the deserted theater). At times, though, the stylization actually intensifies the brutality, and makes us gasp as we're about to laugh—as when Alex croons "Singin' in the Rain" and improvises a tap dance while he kicks a victim practically to insensibility. Those sudden sadistic kicks put the sting back into the old ultra-violence; the effect is not unlike the dramatic rhythm of Burgess' prose: "Georgie let go of holding his goobers apart and just let him have one in the toothless rot with his ringy fist, and that made the old veck start moaning a lot then, then out comes the blood, my brothers, real beautiful."

Throughout these opening scenes of the film, Kubrick adds concrete details that help to animate the nightmare city of tomorrow. Combining real, present-day locations with stylized sets, eighteenth- and twentieth-century decor, Kubrick gives a surprising texture to Burgess' satire. The huge ravaged theater—a giant mural still hanging over the stage, the auditorium completely sacked, a deserted warehouse where rival gangs battle—is a telling image of the desecration of traditional culture. A parallel image exposes the instant disposability of the new plastic culture: In a brilliant shot, Alex walks home to his flatblock, a monster complex of antiseptic, ultra-modern apartment buildings, the surrounding grounds strewn with wreckage and debris, the work of unseen vandals too ubiquitous to fight.

Some people have resented the fact that Kubrick is clearly stimulated by the sex and violence of the early scenes; the ultra-violence seems to inspire all of his most imaginative touches. But then the book never quite recovers from its brilliant opening either. When the novelty of the language begins to wear off, Burgess never discovers anything else to sustain momentum. In the film, even the visual style isn't sustained. The prison scenes are surprisingly routine, and although the film recovers some of its bite during the sequence of the Ludovico therapy, it sinks completely in the last third, after Alex is released from prison. Even the compositions here—as in the scene of Alex's return home to find a lodger installed in his place, or his capture by the radicals—are incredibly static.

Satire appeals to the intellect rather than to the emotions, and the fact that *A Clockwork Orange* has no human depth or complexity wouldn't be troubling if the details were consistently sharp. But evaluating the film purely as fantasy, after the first third it is only fitfully imaginative. In the novel Burgess' high style almost sails over the mock-profundities, but in the film Kubrick's invention flags fairly early, and we're forced to confront the facility of the ideas. The equation of criminal violence and police brutality may please teenagers, but it has turned up in so many movies of the last few years that by

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

now it's no more than a hip cliche. No less banal is the film's discovery that conservative and radical politicians can be equally ruthless, equally insensitive to the individual for all their professed commitment to Individual Liberty. Burgess' parody of radical rhetoric is a minor part of the film, but it's still tiresome, perhaps because it has to be delivered by a grotesquely caricatured Patrick Magee; in both novel and film the level of political analysis seems depressingly naive. The prison chaplain's talk of free will vs. psychological determinism is also played down, and although this is meant to be the central theme, it's articulated in a rather obvious and simplistic way.

Burgess also made one crucial dramatic mistake that the film magnifies. To illustrate his cyclical theory of history, he forces Alex to undergo a series of humiliations at the hands of all the people he has wronged—his parents, an old man he beat up, his former droogs, the radical writer crippled by Alex's assault. In the film these scenes are awkwardly protracted. They seem obligatory scenes—part of an archaic comic pattern of retribution. The action is supposed to have a perfect symmetry, but when you can see in advance exactly what a scheme requires, there's little fun in waiting to watch it worked out in laborious detail. The final irony is also predictable: Alex ends exactly where he began; he has to be reconditioned to become a contented sadist again, so that the political plots and counterplots can be resolved. Burgess originally took the ending one stage further. After his cure, Alex begins to tire of the old ultra-violence, and he has a momentary perception that he is "growing up," on his way to becoming just one more tired bureaucrat; this gave a measure of pathos to the conclusion that the mechanically structured film desperately needs.

Ten years ago Kubrick filmed another novel by a master of words, Nabokov's *Lolita,* and the difference between the two films reveals a great deal about Kubrick's artistic development during that period. As a technician he has clearly advanced; *Lolita* was a visually undistinguished film, weak on atmosphere, while *A Clockwork Orange* is, in the areas of composition, cutting, synchronization of music and image, often a masterly piece of film-making. But in the ways that matter most, Kubrick seems to me to have declined. One indication is in the choice of source material. *Lolita,* a verbally brilliant book, is more than a *tour de force;* it has surprises of character, intensity of feeling, as well as a dazzling literary style. *A Clockwork Orange* relies on its style, and it's a rather tricky performance. Shallower than *Lolita,* it is also a much more ambitious book—a treatise on the direction of Western civilization. Kubrick doesn't seem to have noticed the shallowness; the ambitiousness is undoubtedly what attracted him to the material.

In the decade since he made *Lolita,* Kubrick has become more than an artist; he now sees himself as a philosopher, a metaphysician. *2001,* which first clearly exposed Kubrick's pretensions, was best when it

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

revealed flashes of his skeptical, sardonic wit, worst when straining for interplanetary profundities. Kubrick's perverse sense of humor and his pessimism—his distinguishing characteristics as a director—are still visible in *A Clockwork Orange,* but he isn't as alert as he once was; he's moving deeper into science fiction, dramatizing his prophetic theories of man and the universe. The marvelous nuances of character and performance that made *Lolita*—and, to a lesser extent, *Dr. Strangelove*—exhilarating no longer interest him. There's some brilliance in the opening scenes of *A Clockwork Orange,* before the formidable thesis is allowed to crush any possibility of surprise.

But when the first wave of enthusiasm for *A Clockwork Orange* had died down, and the inevitable reaction set in, I was not quite prepared for its virulence. Pauline Kael led the chorus of skeptics, and there were three separate attacks on Kubrick in the New York Sunday *Times,* some of them likening the film to pornography, and even identifying it as the harbinger of a new fascist mood in American society. Any movie that can inspire this kind of high-powered moral outrage must touch important fears and anxieties. I would have thought the movie's attack on psychological conditioning rather easy to absorb by now, but perhaps it isn't; perhaps this is truly disturbing satire, undermining our faith in scientific progress, and particularly the reverence for the psychologist that Burgess correctly identified as one of the most prevalent contemporary diseases. The social scientists who administer the Ludovico technique in *A Clockwork Orange* are not brutal authoritarians like the prison guards and the police who beat and torture Alex; they are earnest, enlightened experimenters who envision a benign pacifist utopia where aggressive impulses are conditioned out of existence. There is one particularly savage touch in the film that is worth noting: One of the films shown to Alex during the conditioning sessions is of Hitler inspecting the troops at Nuremberg. The scientists are anti-fascist, and they are using their advanced therapy techniques to make Alex feel nauseated instead of stimulated by this Nazi propaganda image of extreme military power, brutality triumphant. What the film is saying is that even sadism is preferable to conditioned anti-fascism, conditioned liberalism, and this may be too much for many liberals to tolerate.

Of course not all liberals have rejected the film. Considering the ruthlessness of the film's mockery of liberalism, there is a rather sick joke in the enthusiasm for Kubrick among middlebrow reviewers, which one can't help seeing as an extreme form of self-hatred. At the other extreme—an extreme of self-righteousness—is Fred M. Hechinger's attack on Kubrick in the New York *Times,* entitled "A Liberal Fights Back." What infuriates the fighting liberal is the film's relentless assault on his traditional belief in reason and progress, in human perfectibility. In spite of Hechinger's charges, a pessimistic movie that mocks the liberal do-gooder isn't necessarily a fascist work. *A Clock-*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

work Orange exposes some of the limitations of liberalism—in what I would have thought was a rather conventional manner; but the hysteria of the reactions suggests that many people interpret the film as a very literal celebration of violence.

A Clockwork Orange has supplied much of the fuel for the crusade against violence in films and on television. (Some of the other movies caught up in the controversy are *The French Connection, Straw Dogs, Dirty Harry, Macbeth, The Cowboys,* and *The Godfather.*) Reactions to violence are extremely subjective. For all my reservations about *Clockwork Orange,* I didn't find the violence in it offensive; on the contrary, it seemed to me quite artfully handled. I didn't even find it particularly upsetting to watch, though many women I know have been very shaken by the violence, for it's usually associated with sexual violation. The stylization kept me at a distance, while the more realistic violence in Sam Peckinpah's *Straw Dogs* disturbed me a great deal more, though again, I found it meaningful and artistically valid.

Whatever one's personal reaction to any of these films, it would help to retain some sense of perspective. There still is no conclusive evidence as to the influence of filmed violence on children or adults. More people should question the critics' glib assertions that movie violence brutalizes and desensitizes an audience. This isn't much different from the way people used to talk about sex on screen. The anti-violence critics try to tell themselves that they aren't encouraging censorship; they seem to believe that censors are only concerned about sex—but they obviously haven't had much contact with the new breed of censors, many of whom are psychologists or psychiatrists, benign totalitarians of the same mentality as the scientists in *A Clockwork Orange.* The new censors will be quite pleased to control film violence in place of sex—as long as they can get their hands on the artists. There's enough to question or criticize in *A Clockwork Orange* without resorting to dangerously imprecise, alarmist cries about the "harmful" effects of screen violence.

Unfortunately for the liberal critics, many of the most interesting films around happen to be violent. At the same time, many of the films intended as antidotes to violent moviemaking are artistic failures. In his article "A Liberal Fights Back," Fred M. Hechinger cited Vittorio De Sica's *The Garden of the Finzi-Continis* as an example of a film to which liberals owe allegiance. It is true that De Sica's film is restrained, humane, compassionate, careful to avoid violence (though its subject is the destruction of the Italian Jews under Mussolini); and unlike the misanthropic *Clockwork Orange,* it demonstrates a belief in human goodness. It would be pleasant to be able to report that, with these virtues, the film is the masterpiece that many of the liberal critics claim to have seen. But although De Sica has unmistakable affection for his characters, he doesn't examine them with

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the necessary clarity or perception. The film is likable surely, intermittently moving, with a number of lovely moments, but it hasn't been intelligently conceived or executed, and a tolerant, clear-eyed view would have to acknowledge that, deeply-felt though it is, it is an extraordinarily slack piece of film-making.

The film is not a very full portrait of the anti-Jewish measures of Mussolini's Italy, but it does give us some information about a subject barely tapped in films. Where the film falters is in attempting to discover a commentary on the social situation in the central romantic drama—the doomed love affair of the middle-class boy Giorgio and Micol, the aristocratic daughter of the Finzi-Continis. The failure of the love affair is presumably intended to parallel the social cataclysm, though the parallel is far from clear. For Giorgio the frustration in his private life eclipses, yet simultaneously intensifies and personalizes the horror of what is happening to the Jews; everything in his world seems to be falling apart, and the helplessness he feels is overwhelming.

But the film, staged and constructed in a straight naturalistic fashion, can't sustain itself as a bittersweet lyric of doomed romanticism; it raises too many literal questions that we can't ignore. Crucial to the film is the question of why Micol and her family respond to the growing threat of fascism by simply closing themselves off in their garden, and waiting to be destroyed. It is never clear whether De Sica intends to criticize their passivity and masochism, or whether he is merely enchanted by their indolence and their luxurious style of living. There isn't any obvious criticism built into the loving, idealized portrait of the Finzi-Continis (who are noble and benevolent throughout). De Sica seems to have meant the film as an elegy for a vanishing way of life, but he can't quite conceal a certain impatience with the family's languor. Or perhaps that comes through in spite of his intentions. At any rate, the film often seems out of control.

There is an oblique hint of incest in the relationship of Micol and her dying brother, but nothing is made of this. If De Sica wanted to acknowledge the suffocating insularity and inbreeding of this aristocratic world, he hasn't brought the idea into focus. Micol's rejection of Giorgio seems almost wilfully perverse—incomprehensible, really. When she instead begins an affair with a man who isn't worthy of her, the coarse non-Jewish engineer Malnate, is she consciously trying to degrade herself, or is she using this liaison with an outsider to extend herself and break free of her stifling refined world? The material is here for a very complex psychological study, but De Sica doesn't provide the necessary order. He relies on Dominique Sanda's impenetrably beautiful face to carry the film. The result is that Micol's complexity is asserted but not dramatized; she actually comes across as a mysterious blank.

De Sica, the neorealist master, may not be entirely comfortable

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

dealing with this aristocratic world; he bathes the garden of the Finzi-Continis in a golden nostalgic haze that only confuses most of the issues. He is more adept at detailing Giorgio's bourgeois family life. These scenes—a Passover Seder interrupted by threatening phone calls, the conflict and reconciliation of Giorgio and his father—are done with affection *and* clarity, and they are filled with details that continually enrich our understanding of the characters. As a social observer De Sica still works with economy and feeling. A brief scene in which Giorgio is forced to leave the public library, while the other people stare after him silently, unobtrusively implies a good deal about ordinary people's acquiescence in fascist intimidation.

Since the film seems much closer to Giorgio than to the Finzi-Continis, it might have been more effective structured as a first-person film. Had De Sica presented the entire film from Giorgio's point of view, that might not have solved all of the problems, but it would have helped us to accept the murky, unfinished portrait of the Finzi-Continis; we would have known that we were sharing Giorgio's confused, enchanted perspective, and we would have tried to draw our own tentative conclusions. In Joseph Losey's *The Go-Between,* another film about an outsider mesmerized by a mysterious aristocratic world, we were not permitted to see anything that the the boy visitor did not see. The ambiguities always seemed appropriate. *The Garden of the Finzi-Continis,* on the other hand, is a third-person film. It shows us things that Giorgio cannot see—scenes of Micol alone, or with her brother—and since the point of view is that of an omniscient narrator, we expect to understand *more* than a participant like Giorgio possibly could. Perhaps De Sica knew that he did not have the assurance at lyric film-making necessary for a subjective film, but he has evaded the crucial problem of point of view.

The film almost makes up for its weaknesses in the concluding scenes, when the Finzi-Continis are rounded up and interned in the local school with the other Jews of Ferrara, before the journey to the concentration camps. These scenes are painful and moving, done without overemphasis—or almost. Even here a few intrusive touches call attention to themselves. For example, when one of the soldiers carelessly knocks over a figurine in the Finzi-Contini mansion, the camera moves in for a pregnant closeup of the broken pieces. There are a few more closeups—of dying rosepetals around a vase of flowers, and of the Finzi-Continis' dog staring after their retreating car—planted to tug at the heart-strings. These are only minor lapses, but they are unfortunately characteristic of the calendar art lyricism that De Sica tends to indulge in. He isn't quite willing to let the images speak for themselves; he feels he has to prod us with "poetic" metaphors. And after the searing final scene—the separation of the family, and Micol's attempt to comfort her bewildered grandmother—the camera returns to the deserted gardens, and there are flashbacks of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Micol and her brother playing tennis—in slow motion, of course. Those contrived flashbacks break the elegiac mood that De Sica has built, and underline the intention with an amateur's obviousness. Devices like these are too naive to be offensive, but it is disturbing that De Sica settles for easy effects in *The Garden of the Finzi-Continis,* weakening the impact that the film might have had.

These two films represent two extreme poles in contemporary film style. *The Garden of the Finzi-Continis* is traditional, romantic, humanistic in outlook; *A Clockwork Orange* is brutal, nihilistic, coldly sardonic. It is tempting to come down on the side of one film or the other—to report that the humanistic *Garden* is a masterpiece, or that the more radical *Clockwork Orange* represents the way forward for film artists. In truth both movies are no more than interesting failures. Too many people have been relying on a vague commitment to humanism as a substitute for rigorous critical analysis. Humanism, however admirable as a philosophy of personal and social relationships, has never been adequate as an aesthetic theory. Perhaps a comparison between these two ambitious, accomplished, unsatisfying films will demonstrate that art stubbornly resists moral prescriptions.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Reviews

WILLIAM DICKEY

Public and Private Poetry

THE RECENT DEATH OF JOHN BERRYMAN, who was certainly the fiercest, and very probably the best teacher of writing I have ever known, and the appearance of a sensitive appreciation of his personality and his work by Robert Lowell in *The New York Review of Books*,[1] has led me into thinking about the relationship of private and public poetry in America, of how our poetry at the present time chooses to or is able to deal with the nature of general events around us. I have been wondering whether there is at the moment a special American attitude toward events that is noticeably different from that I find in various contemporary works in translation.

Perhaps the best way I can begin this kind of consideration is to be anecdotal. Lowell writes of Berryman: "As he became more inspired and famous and drunk, he became less good company and more a happening . . ." My own acquaintance with Berryman was for a little more than a semester some fifteen years ago at the University of Iowa. It remains vivid in my mind: any student, I think, is likely to recall having a poem of his held out at the length of an indignant arm over a seminar table, and hearing a voice filled with a sort of wrathful incredulity saying: "Now what are we to make of this ridiculous poem?" The time was a troubled and chaotic one for Berryman, as far as I was in a position to judge; it ended in general distress, anger, and a sudden departure. But it had been important to me, and I was astonished when, a few years later, as a junior instructor at Cornell, I was asked to lunch to meet Mark Van Doren, who had been Berryman's instructor at Columbia, and found that something very strange had happened to history. Van Doren recounted with interest what Berryman had told him: how, having accepted a position at the University of Iowa, he had boarded the train from Chicago, reached Iowa City, looked out at the dismal railway station and the little town behind it, and had then gone straight on to Minneapolis without ever getting off the train. Berryman had edited his life, he had removed some six months of it as one might remove a feverish appendix, and it seemed to me that in doing so he had removed or edited some of my life too.

Such editing is one way, and perhaps not that unusual a one, in which a poet can deal with events: he can reshape himself, and the

[1] April 6, 1972.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

events he chooses to consider, until his life is, as Lowell's statement suggests, appropriately public. The poet has turned himself into his story, a story that happened to a public person rather than to a private one, and that is shaped as a narrative, perhaps even an epic narrative, might be shaped. In *His Toy, His Dream, His Rest,*[2] Berryman has replaced his personal figure with a public *persona,* Henry, and Berryman is careful to warn us not to suppose an identity between these figures. I thought at first that his advice was disingenuous, that I must refer the public figure back to the personal one; now I am less sure. Even if he is actively involved in public events, will a contemporary American poet be able to use those events as the subjects of his poetry without some intermediary displacement: does he in fact have to become someone else in order to be able to tell us who he is? Can we live directly or only obliquely in the immediate occasions of our time? What forms or distances will become necessary for us if we attempt to deal with Vietnam or Biafra or Bangladesh? It seems to me in this connection instructive that the only student I know who is a member of the IRA telephoned me this week to ask if he could read me his first attempt at a villanelle.

I suppose that what I am beginning to suggest here is a lack of imaginative sympathy with events: it is in a way a reversal of the kind of identification that permitted Milton or Swinburne to write poems on the political happenings of Italy. They could, in each case, suppose themselves within a world of their own imaginative creation. Our situation, as compared to theirs, seems to depend on there being less room for the imagination. Events that are reported in minute and repetitive detail, and that are buttressed by their repetition through medium after medium, begin to assume an independent validity: how can we *imagine* the blood that has already been smeared in cold, greasy gobbets over our hands and mouths and eyes? I cannot think how many poems on the subject of Vietnam I have encountered in the last five years. Almost all of them have been bad in a photographic sense; they have been unable to free themselves from a visual and imagistic derivation from other media. A recently published anthology called *Enough of Dying*[3] includes a substantial selection of poems devoted to peace; with a noble exception by Denise Levertov, most of the poems are by poets who are dead or venerable or translated, or any two of the above

If we cannot make a successfully direct approach to the public events of our time, what other possibilities are open to us? One possibility is ritual, for ritual assumes a distance and an impersonality. It supposes that any event of sufficient importance to be recorded belongs not to one voice, but to the whole voice of the people; the speaker then accommodates his own sense of the event to the shared

2 Reviewed in THE HUDSON REVIEW, (Vol. XXII, No. 2) Summer 1969.

3 ENOUGH OF DYING, edited by *Kay Boyle and Justine Van Gundy.* Dell. $1.25.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sense, but is not so dominated by that shared sense as to be unable to speak; he is, in a sense that contemporary American poets seldom are, a representative. His voice contains the voices of the people about him.

The ritual use of language shows very clearly in Willard Trask's translations of tribal African poetry.[4] These poems are anonymous, identified only by the name of the tribe. Here is one from the Ewe of Togo:

DIRGE

He died; no song, no drumming, no sport, he is a poor man
and his clan is poor.
One dies in fire, one dies in water. So do we all belong to
death and go to our place.
I was at home alone, and I heard a bitter wailing; I went and
found my brother dead and drummed in grief.

Here is another poem from the Hausa of Nigeria:

THE HUNT

It is not for the meat
But for the sport of it that we hunt.
If you think we are out for meat,
We will go back!
Meat is something you find at home or at the butcher's.

What seems especially noticeable about these poems is their identification of personal and social events. What happens to the poor man dying can happen only within the context of his clan, and, beyond that, within the universal context of the ubiquity of death. In "The Hunt" there is the assumption of a shared social qualification—an ambition or desire held in common—and of a rejection of those who do not appreciate the desire. The poems automatically assume that they are able to speak from the position of "we" rather than from that of "I"; in so doing, they necessarily establish themselves in a public personality.

The two poems I have cited consider both the active and the passive aspects of death: dying and killing. Both of these aspects are I think essential to a poetry of ritual; if ritual is to be a part of our lives we are haunted by Frazer's Grove of Nemi, and by both participants: the figure who must die, and the figure who must kill in order eventually to die.

The ritual aspects I have noted in Black African poetry seem to translate into Black American poetry: again there is the sense of an effective community, and that community is in some way defined by the expectation of death. Here is a passage from a poem by Don E. Lee:[5]

[4] CLASSIC BLACK AFRICAN POEMS, selected and edited by *Willard Trask*. The Eakins Press. $3.95.

[5] THE BLACK POETS, edited by *Dudley Randall*. Bantam Books. $1.65.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

she was in a seriously-funny mood
from the get-go she was down, realdown:

roaches around here are like
letters on a newspaper
or
u gonta be a writer, hunh
when u gone write me some writen
or
the way niggers act around here
if talk cd kill we'd all be dead.

And here is the beginning of a poem, "My Poem," by Nikki Giovanni:

i am 25 years old
black female poet
wrote a poem asking
nigger can you kill
if they kill me
it won't stop
the revolution

i have been robbed
it looked like they knew
that i was to be hit
they took my tv
my two rings
my piece of african print
and my two guns
if they take my life
it won't stop
the revolution

I find it curious, even as I type these pages, to find how difficult it is not automatically to capitalize "I." Typographical conventions presumably respond to some sense of identity: to use the lower case "i" diminishes the sense of separate personality; as in Cummings, it supposes a general acuity to phenomena, a general response.

Like the African poems in Trask's anthology, then, these contemporary black poets refer personal experience back to a sense of social experience. They do so not only in terms of shared experience—an experience which I have suggested involves the mutual expectation of death—but also in terms of a shared linguistic convention. Moving out of the essentially white language, though not of white experience, of a poet like Claude McKay, contemporary black poets have established special visual conventions intended to represent their own language—a language that is not Standard Midwestern English, or anything like it. I have seen these new and special conventions in the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

work of students; they are clearly demonstrated in a passage from Sonia Sanchez' "Listenen to Big Black at S.F. State:"

no mo meetings
where u talk bout
whitey. the cracker
who done u wrong
(like some sad/bitch
who split in the middle of yo/comen)

It is astonishingly hard simply to reproduce the lines: the voice wants to normalize them, to refer them back to its own assumptions of how voices sound. Its assumptions are wrong; the visual convention has force only because it represents a true sound differentiation.

And it is on this sense of differentiation that poetic ritual seems to depend. It requires a linguistic community, and an exclusive one, as with the set forms and special training of poets like the Irish bards. The community is self-defined, not open to criticism or evaluation from the outside: it relies on its internal coherence and its knowledge of particulars, rather than on a Johnsonian assumption that human behavior is general and universal. Yet contemporary black poetry, unlike the tribal poetry, does seem in some way to be *directed* toward an audience outside. The relationship is not one of dialogue. Outside the speaking community there is meant to be a community of mute hearers: mute in that they cannot from colloquial ability value the form or the language. Ritual asserts that it is separate, that it has a special identity. In this instance, I think that identity is asserted in terms of the ritual's better and closer claims to death. What it seems to be saying to the white reader is this: You cannot speak what we are speaking, but you can hear what we are speaking, and what we say is a commentary on your failure to die.

The first form of ritual with which I am dealing is then both social and linguistic: it depends on the assumption of an inturned world, but of a world which is essentially human. The second form may perhaps be shown in the poems of Okot p'Bitek, a contemporary African poet. Edward Blishen, in his introduction to *Song of a Prisoner*,[6] comments on "that habit, so intrinsic to Okot p'Bitek's writing that one almost ceases to notice it, of referring incessantly to life other than human—to the life of animals, insects, plants."

Song of a Prisoner is the third volume of a continuing poem; it is however the first that I have seen. The poetry is translated, by the poet, from Ocholi into English. It is hard, then, to understand what its original rhymic basis may have been, save that it has some relationship to tribal drumming. On the other hand, as often happens in translation, the imagistic basis seems persuasive:

[6] SONG OF A PRISONER, by *Okot p'Bitek*. Introduction by *Edward Blishen*. The Third Press. $4.95.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Look at my athletic thighs,
My chest was broad
And without a scar,
My teeth were the
White *okok* birds
Standing on the back
Of a buffalo bull . . .

Have you heard me
Playing the mother drum?
Have you seen me
In the dancing arena?

As in Aubrey Menen's fine book, *The Prevalence of Witches,* which posits Eastern and Western understandings of events against one another, and arrives at an understanding of hydrophobia based on witchcraft, Okot p'Bitek seems poised between two opposed rituals. One is abstract, it is of the law, and it is only reluctantly accepted:

Your Honour,
Why do they beat me
With their clubs
And tie my hands
And feet
With this rope?

The other ritual is that of a recollected association: an assurance that human beings have non-abstract qualities, are indeed part of a continuum of experience in which no element is capable of being seen as isolated from its surroundings:

A black Benz
Slithers smoothly
Through the black night
Like the water snake
Into the Nile,
Listen to it purring
Like a hopeful leopard . . .

These poems, in their sophisticated combination of image, may pose more exactly or succinctly some of the problems contemporary American poetry has in dealing with its experience. The speaker is a believer in *uhuru,* freedom; somehow that freedom has come to require his imprisonment, and it is profoundly difficult for him to reconcile events and expectations. How can the images of nature, how can nature itself, conform to the fact of his disability and seclusion?

Identification with nature, identification specifically with the world

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of animals, in its most extended sense, is a part of freedom to Otok p'Bitek: it is a given, something he expects to exist from the natural order of things. But it may also be an achieved end, a reduction of complexities: I think of Frost's line "Back out of all this now too much for us." If human events are indescribable, perhaps the perspective of animals will allow us a singler and clearer vision. The ceremony of becoming an animal, of rooting and identifying oneself in a non-human mode of feeling, may be a way of establishing ritual, and thus of establishing public poetry, when a human social pattern of ritual has failed. Shinkichi Takahashi, in his preface to *After Images,*[7] a selection of translations of his poems, suggests this failure of the social context: "In Japan, since the decline of Buddhism, morals and manners have ceased to exist, and simultaneously respect for life and a view of social life such as the right relationship between young and old, have disappeared."

This statement has to me some special force, since I am writing on Easter Sunday, and the bells of the parish church have just completed playing the national anthem. The religious and secular rituals have gathered and acknowledged one another. But this afternoon there will be an Easter Hat competition in a gay bar in the near neighborhood. Given that framework, how is a "right relationship" to be established? Which events are most actual, and which most central?

In his effort ritually to understand this problem, Takahashi uses the world of animals aggressively: I don't mean by this a sense of violence, but rather an explosion from a central source: when once the initial identification with an image of nature has been established, its ramifications seem in fact to be everywhere:

OX AND SLEET

When an ox, sleet covered my horns
And, like a bird on a TV antenna,
A rock lodged on the tip of my tongue.
Wind swirls the globe, and there's
A Catholic Sister who, in her white wimple,
Resembles an ox's hoof (the universe
Wavers in the nest of the ox's nose).

When a deer, a maple grew from my leg—
Now whether something's there or not,
What difference? A thing lies neither
Sidelong nor lengthwise, after all,
And this woman breathes life into the universe:
In one breath an ox became a deer.

[7] AFTER IMAGES, Zen Poems of *Shinkichi Takahashi,* selected and translated by *Lucien Stryk and Takashi Ikemoto.* The Swallow Press. $5.00.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The image of the ox seems here to collect and identify the human universe, by being simpler than it: with this kind of referent working we are not at a loss in our relationship to events: we can determine that ox and nun share a common potentiality of shape, that the ox is capable of transmutation into a deer, once we consider the animal transmutations at all, that the universe can waver in the nest of the ox's nose in the sense that a whole world can be implicit from any manifestation: we must start somewhere, but it may not make all that difference where it is we start:

A RICHER GROUND

The bus roars through cherry blossoms
Or a snowstorm. Who knows?

I'm not on it, but then again
I'm not not on it. Who knows?

Seals glide across an iceberg,
Where bound? Who knows?

Of course I may be quite wrong,
Which in any case is unavoidable.

The question 'To be or not to be'
Just isn't fair. I stand on richer ground.

I have tried to suggest that ritual is a means of connecting one event with another, whether through the shared agreement of a common linguistic convention, or through the use of an intermediary reference which is in some way more direct and more complicated in its invocations than is the penumbra of multiplied and often trivial events. Takahashi's use of ritual would seem in the first instance to depend on a discipline of the mind that expects connections rather than discontinuities, that supposes that any place you stand things and events gather themselves about you. Even in saying that I am being obviously anthropocentric: things and events gather and are perceived by one another; the meaning of them I suppose is in their interpenetration of their dance.

If Takahashi's ritual seems to me both attractive and hard to explain, his translators have taken care to point out the extent to which his thought *does* depend on a special discipline. They stress the particular sense of Zen that governs his poems: the assumption I mentioned above that no starting point is much preferable to another, once hierarchical discriminations are no longer seen as a central means of organizing the world of image and of experience. It is for me very difficult to dissociate myself from the Great Chain of Being, to leave the assumption that events are relatively public or private depending on whom they happen to, and in what historical

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

circumstances. "The bus roars through cherry blossoms/ Or a snowstorm. Who knows?" I know, because I am there with a Baedeker and a barometer, and have checked up ahead of time to make sure that the bus has enough gas for that particular trip. In all of this I am permitting the *minutiae* of events to govern me. I am watching their lips or their eyelashes; I have hardly relaxed enough to recognize them as Takahashi recognizes them before I must realize that they are gone.

Takahashi's translators comment on the importance to him of the achievement of *satori,* which to me implies an absolute simultaneity and identity of person and objects. The American use of the animal ritual seems to me closer to the definition that Joyce makes in the latter part of *Portrait of the Artist,* when he is discussing the Aquinian definition of *quidditas.* That quality I understand as involving an intense vision which still retains a distinction between the person seeing and the thing seen. Where Takahashi emerges into the animal world like a seal surfacing in its essential element, American poets generally descend into that world: it is for them not an assumption but a reduction of personality. And this reduction takes place, I think, in order to make the poet humanly vulnerable: that is, to reinforce his vulnerability in terms of a whole self, even if that self must be reduced before the vulnerability can emerge. If we die only little deaths of disgust or anger or humiliation, there is no way to make our deaths public: they are not large enough. Is it a paradox to suppose that diminishing complexity, entering a world that has fewer and more central events, will allow us the sense we want of some kind of heroic size?

Yet it seems finally not quite to work in that way. If we consider events, there must be a distinction between those who effect them and those by whom they are affected: between the doer and the person to whom something is done. If we identify with the latter, the animal world becomes a ritual of impotence, a place in which events are imposed.

This seems to me to happen in a poem I find genuinely moving: "The Goshawk" by John Haines.[8] As Haines imaginatively becomes a terrified animal, an animal that will not escape destruction, he seems both to admit the hierarchical order of being I spoke of, the sense of social possibility as an arrangement of preying and being preyed upon, and to suppose that the poet's role in such an order is to submit:

THE GOSHAWK

I will not walk on that road again,
it is like a story one hesitates to begin.

You find yourself alone,

[8] TWENTY POEMS, by *John Haines.* Unicorn Press. $6.95.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the fur close about your face, your feet
soft and quiet in the frost.

Then, with a cold, rushing sound,
there's a shadow like the death-angel
with buffeting wings,
his talons gripping your shoulder,
the bright beak tearing and sinking . . .

Then, you are falling, swept
into the deepening red sack of a voice:

"Little rabbit, you are bleeding again;
with his old fire-born passion
the Goshawk feeds on your timid heart."

I suppose I could dismiss this poem as representing some kind of anxious dream, but I'm not inclined to do so: I think it shows instead a real and terrifying sense of ritual, a reduction of events to the incapable moment in which only their terror can be dealt with. That it is *only* the terror seems to me a commentary on our ability to identify and deal with our events; the reduction we make is often a reduction in the name of terror, of an inability to suppose that events are controllable or coherent. It is the panic reaction; the moment at the end of Ravel's *La Valse* when the insistent rhythm begins to slide and skew. In that moment, if we have been the assured dancers, we will find ourselves diminished. It will be necessary to mask, to put on disguises in the sense of the eighteenth-century theatre, because our real faces, the events of our public lives, are no longer visually tolerable

A considerable part of John Haines's life has been spent in Alaska, and it may be that only in wilderness is the myth of the animal allowed its full development. Under an abiding absence and cold it is more possible to allow an explanation of events that is not directly social. I have suggested that to identify with the life of an animal is to accept both a simpler and a more death-oriented world; in ordinary life brushing our teeth, showering, using underarm deodorant may be enough to distract us from the advent of mortality. To enter, as ritual, the body of an intermediary, especially of an animal intermediary, is in some way to make a more human contact. If the ritual clothes us with the masks of dogs or of foxes, our disguise will work toward lessening those things in us which are so distractingly human as not to be centrally human:

There is a small, soft thing
in the snow, and its ears
are beginning to freeze.

Its eyes are bright, but

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

what they see is not this world
but some other place
where the wind, warm and
well fed, sleeps
on a deep, calm water.

A considerable part of my purpose in this review has been to suggest that contemporary poetry in America finds it difficult to make simple, unadulterated statements. I don't believe the present state of our culture encourages such statements: as it becomes harder to cash a check, harder to buy gasoline at a service station after nightfall, so it seems to me to become harder to know or say what we mean as people: all forms of transactions, including verbal forms, turn out to be less valid. One way of countering this failure of validity is by the acceptance of a ritual intermediary convention. It is not of course the only way, nor is it the one most frequently employed. Other ways involve the elevation of language, or the more complicated manipulation of irony. Of all the poets I have been reading, I should have supposed Daniel Berrigan[9] would have been most direct: here, after all, is a man involved in action as very few of us have allowed ourselves to become involved. But action must have another idiom than the one I would have assigned to it; the man acting is something other than what I thought he was, or is reflected in different mirrors. Berrigan's work, which I would have supposed revolutionary and absolute, is instead involute: the mind that can consider the possibility of action is extraordinarily intricate before it starts:

LATE

I follow stumbling Jesus down the wall:
porter and brigand at his passing
swing wide his wounds and spread my hands for gold

then stand erect in her torrential glance
who flowers in the iron street
and gives me sudden spring to die in

nos morituri: he and I passed boyhood
both in country places, saw sunset finger
idly a first star, walked the enormous dawn

now tardy by centuries I come to town
only to see (as he) through fury
a woman standing though the skies are down.

Berrigan's language seems to me much influenced by Hopkins, and I suppose that such an influence can be instructive, in the terms

[9] ENCOUNTERS, by *Daniel Berrigan*. World. $5.95.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of public poetry that I am trying to deal with here. In many poems, Hopkins adopts the syntax of foreign languages in his handling of English: there are poems which can be successfully read only if one makes the effort to consider English an inflected rather than a word-order language. But to make such an effort is necessarily to divorce the reader from his instinctive sense of idiom, and from the tone of his most immediate speaking voice. Like the displacement into the world of animals, this change in voice seems to me an effort to modify events, but it seems a weaker effort: the concentration that can be effected by this language is genuine enough, but at the same time it is elaborate:

> Roots curled fastidious,
> a fern at window
> eyes the great-boned maple steadying for death. A cat
> sat at a bullfight, and was bored.

A fern "at window" rather than "at the window." I can't help but feel that the assumption of this language, in its deliberate avoidance of idiom, is somehow to convey that our experience is inadequate. What is that cat *doing* at the bullfight? I suspect it is there arbitrarily, and that the dislocation of image is intended to support a dislocution of normal speech, that arbitrariness is being used to attack my own sense of my experience, and used, I am afraid, in a superior way. Phyllis McGinley, in a comment on Berrigan's book, says that "Father Berrigan writes what is called 'difficult' poetry in that one must bend the whole mind to the encounter with *his* mind." I suppose that is a possible and even perhaps a devout response, but I am a little puzzled by it. Why ought my mind to *submit* to poetry, even if the poetry is public and appropriate and legitimately devotional? But I do not think that this poetry is very public after all; rather, it seems the poetry of a public position, what is said by someone who has confused the private and the public roles. I think that such a confusion is easier than it ought to be in our time, and I can hardly fault Berrigan for having allowed it. But I still feel that the nimbus of his language is instructing me without having the direct right to instruct me. The elevation of the language is like and unlike the elevation of the Host; the first elevation assumes that I share a ritual in which, as it happens, I am not a participant.

Yet as I argue or criticize, I am concerned with the same question my poets are concerned with. What is it we are trying to do? I think of poetry, when I am writing it, as my best way of finding out who I am. For those of us whose means of being is language, that involves a concentration of language which is a concentration and recognition of self. There is the moment of the poem in which I must be more alert, more aware. And I have to do that in a world of events that is often apocalyptic. What will I do, over and over, merely counting the dead?

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Like many of my contemporaries, I speak domestically. It is an easy voice, a natural one. I respect it very much when I see it done well, as in C. G. Hanzlicek's *Living In It.*[10]

ON MT TAMALPAIS

A new generation of lizards
Is sunning itself.
They are the size of my wife's
Little finger, and as we
Bow to look at them,
They curl under the lips
Of rocks for cover.

Deer graze
On the knolls below.
Through the binoculars
We can see their soft ears
Twitching, silhouetted against
The new grass.

The fog bank that glides
Toward San Francisco,
Like a sea above the sea,
Is broken again and again
At its edge
By an updraft.

We want only this sound
Of our boots against the stones
But, if we listen closely,
There are the soft confessions
Of tires claiming
The land we have left behind,

And no matter what is wild
And moves us,
It is always the Naval
Radar dome,
Like the shaved head
Of a god breaking through
From underground, that our eyes
Come home to.

This language is perhaps the most typical of contemporary American poetry; it has excluded the possibility of ritual, unless irony can be assumed to have ritual qualities. It is quiet and reserved, and it has made the unusual assumption that the public fact must

[10] LIVING IN IT, by *C. G. Hanzlicek*. The Stone Wall Press. $6.75.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

be regarded as personal: the radar dome doesn't exist publically, but only as an extension of a personal consideration.

I suppose it is this consideration of public events with which I am most in sympathy, but it is not the final one that I ought to note. I have tried to suggest ways of dealing with public events through ritual and through irony; there is another way, though it is not a very easy one. It seems to me to be indicated in the monumental volume of *The Collected Poems of Frank O'Hara.*[11] I wonder if he would have appreciated the capital letters; they seem, as this pretentious book seems, to make him absolutely an established thing, some kind of Roman phenomenon.

I was talking this afternoon about O'Hara's poetry with a friend, and I thought how odd this book is: that a man whose work established itself in glances should be made into an obelisk. The quality of O'Hara's mind must seem different to his disciples than it seems to me. I find him gay, glancing, ephemeral, not at all willing to let me settle in and make staid New England evenings of him. He's fun, bitchy—and here he is enshrined in a volume that rivals the Variorium Yeats, in size if not in seriousness. Surely that solemnity would have amused him.

The book irritates me, but the poems don't. And they provide the last point I have to make about public poetry: O'Hara has made his private self public. There is, in fact, nothing that he is not prepared to do or to say.

I can't think I've arrived at a resolution; it is only a problem that will go on resonating. But I feel touched and moved by O'Hara; my own efforts at a public poetry are informed by him. Let me then end my quoting him, and giving him, what I feel he ought to have, the last word:

SONG

Did you see me walking by the Buick Repairs?
I was thinking of you
having a Coke in the heat it was your face
I saw on the movie magazine, no it was Fabian's
I was thinking of you
and down at the railroad tracks where the station
has mysteriously disappeared
I was thinking of you
as the bus pulled away in the twilight
I was thinking of you
and right now

[11] THE COLLECTED POEMS OF FRANK O'HARA, edited by *Donald Allen.* Alfred A. Knopf. $17.50.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ZULFIKAR GHOSE

Ghalib[1]

I GREW UP HEARING GHALIB. Ghalib and Iqbal. They would gather in the evenings in the courtyard, the male adults of the family, in the dutsy courtyard which had been sprinkled with water, pomegranate bushes glowing red in the dusk beside the brick wall, the guava tree limp in the corner, and the *hookah* would be passed—a school-teacher uncle, another who was a civil servant, my father, a manager at a sports goods factory, and several others. There would be talk of politics, a story or two of some British sahib, and finally the recitation from memory: Ghalib and Iqbal.

I indulge in this memory to communicate something of the emotional importance of poetry to the Muslims of the Indian subcontinent. I have come a long way from the Urdu of my childhood, I stammer when I try to speak it for so many of the words are lost; and the last time I was in Lahore I had the disagreeable experience of trying to explain in Urdu to a policeman that I did not have sufficient Urdu with which to answer his questions about a traffic misdemeanor. And yet there are Urdu verses that I can never forget, which I can still recite fluently. I still *hear* Ghalib and Iqbal. It is a poetry that resides, I believe, in my soul; it moves me in a way in which nothing written in English can move me.

To talk of the soul in this fashion is, indeed, to talk in the language of Urdu poetry. It is a way of talking which the normal part of me abhors, for I embody that particular phenomenon of the modern world, the westernised Oriental whose education mocks his racial memories. If I had gurus (*ustads,* I should say in this Urdu context), they wore three-piece suits and had such names as Wittgenstein and Ayer; and if I chanted slogans in my youth, they were likely to be *Go in fear of abstraction* and *Consign metaphysics to the flames.* So that when I see my racial memories come back *in English,* I feel the keenest loathing for them; whereas when I hear the Urdu echoes within me, then the ecstasy is indescribable. And there you have the crux of the matter, something which Aijaz Ahmad in his Introduction to *Ghazals of Ghalib* himself admits. Urdu, says Mr. Ahmad, is "very much a language of abstractions. . . . The movement in Urdu poetry is always *away* from concreteness." Such a procedure is quite alien to common English speech; to English poetry, it is totally repugnant. It would follow that there can be no

[1] THE GHAZALS OF GHALIB, ed. Aijaz Ahmad. Columbia University Press. $10.00. GHALIB 1797-1869, Volume I: Life and Letters, translated and edited by *Ralph Russell* and *Khurshidul Islam.* Harvard University Press. $8.50.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

translation of Urdu poetry. Mr. Ahmad admits this when he makes the generally defensive statement that "translation is approximation." It is a convenient subterfuge, for the truth is that meaningful translation, which is hard enough within the common western culture, is very nearly impossible when the original culture is as remote as that to which Ghalib's Urdu belongs. The Urdu still sings in my soul just as hearing Ustad Bismillah Khan play the *shahnai* evokes immense passion though the music I am more intellectually in tune with is Stravinsky's; but these English renderings of Ghalib? Absurdities beside the perfectly realized world of pure abstraction; thalidomide babies beside tall athletes.

Having said the harshest thing about *Ghazals of Ghalib,* it is a pleasure to record that, *as a book,* it is first-class, a model of its kind, and much of the praise goes to Mr. Ahmad. He is that rare kind of editor who is scholarly without being solemn, who appreciates the American reader's difficulties which he anticipates with lucid explanation. He is helpful without being condescending, and engages one's intelligent sympathy. The brief biography with which the Introduction begins conveys the essence of the time: the collapse of the Mughal Empire, the revolt of 1857, the advent of the British Empire. And Ghalib in the midst of it all, witnessing hangings and imprisonments of his friends, bemoaning his own insecurity, but somehow surviving. It was a time of universal chaos, of seeing meanings into existence because the evidence of daily life was predominantly of death.

Mr. Ahmad also provides essential insights into the nature of Urdu poetry and of the ghazal form:

> The metaphysics of Urdu poetry, and of Ghalib in particular can be approached in terms of three questions: What is the nature of the universe and man's place in it? What is God? What is love? The ghazal is a poem made up of couplets, each couplet wholly independent of any other in meaning and complete in itself as a unit of thought, emotion and communication. . . . The *only* link is in terms of prosodic structure and rhymes. All the lines in a ghazal have to be of equal metrical length.

There are thirty-seven ghazals, chosen from hundreds that Ghalib wrote, in the book, and Mr. Ahmad's presentation of them ought to become the standard procedure in the publication of poetry in translation. He gives us first the Urdu original, then a literal translation; this is followed by detailed notes which give a glossary of the key words as well as a general explanation of some of the poem's philosophical ideas. Thus the poem can become intellectually accessible even though the actual English rendering finds one in another world altogether. For example, the literal translation of the first ghazal's first couplet is:

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The world is no more than a manifestation of the uniqueness
of the Beloved;
But for the Beauty that seeks its own awareness, we ourselves
would not exist.

Four words from this couplet are explained in fifteen lines; then there is the following general explanation:

> Metaphysical verse. God is perceived through three related Islamic concepts: God as Beloved; God as Creator; God as the ultimate principle.
>
> The original concept is this: just as man and his universe owe their existence to God, God too could not reveal Himself without creating the temporal world. Thus, the act of creation is God's necessity, the absolutely necessary act of self-realization. World is God reflecting upon himself.

The English translation (by William Stafford) goes:

> Only Love has brought to us the world:
> Beauty finds itself, and we are found.

The same ghazal is also translated by W. S. Merwin who renders the above couplet thus:

> There is only one beloved face
> but it is everywhere
>
> not seeing it we are nothing
> not revealed in its eyes

Neither Stafford nor Merwin can possibly mean anything of what Mr. Ahmad has prepared us to expect; and indeed, if it were not for the editor's instructing the reader in advance, the reader would dismiss the lines as a gesturing emptiness of a puerile mind. No amount of sympathetic analysis will take the reader to Ghalib's intended meaning. Instead, one finds oneself comparing the two English versions, and this is where the interest of the translations lies. For given two languages like Urdu and English which are as stubbornly exclusive of each other's ideas as two Cold War powers of each other's doctrines, what we look for is how far the translator has succeeded in extending English so that it can attempt to express new areas of thought without losing its own peculiar qualities. In this sense, of the seven American poets translating Ghalib in this volume, one can be said to have succeeded: William Stafford. I am not saying he has given us good Ghalib; no: he has given us good English poetry. W. S. Merwin comes close, but not quite. The others (Adrienne Rich, David Ray, Thomas Fitzsimmons, Mark Strand, and William Hunt) suffer by comparison. A few examples—first from Ghazal VIII:

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

There is no message that will satisfy the mystery I sense.
Even secret letters from my home arrive here torn open.

(tr. William Hunt)

Exiled, how can I rejoice, forced here from home,
and even my letters torn open?

(tr. William Stafford)

Stafford is fluent, colloquial, concise; Hunt is rhythmically desperate and ends by being downright clumsy. Stafford captures a certain despair, Hunt is unwittingly comical. From Ghazal XIII:

I'm too old for an inner wildness, Ghalib,
when the violence of the world is all around me.

(tr. Adrienne Rich)

Oh, Ghalib!—weak limbs, no hope, disgust:
no balance now, even in this dust.

(tr. William Stafford)

Ghalib! Your limbs have become feeble;
Gone is any justice in the scheme of things.

(tr. Mark Strand)

Strand is closest to the literal translation; however, his attempt to be colloquial has trapped him into ending with a cliché. Rich uses a language which is vigorous on the surface but its tone seems to be wrong; "an inner wildness" is a romantic gesture. Both have fallen for the literal translation's use of the personal pronoun in the first line while Stafford has cunningly got out of it with the heavy, awesome pause after "Oh, Ghalib!" And Stafford's second line again captures Ghalib's despair, and so charges the simple words "now" and "even" and emphasizes them by letting the caesura fall between them, that the terrifying gloom in the poet's mind is made concrete. Stafford makes his words work. From Ghazal XXV:

If ever it occurs to her to be kind to me
she remembers how cruel she's been
and it frightens her off

(tr. W. S. Merwin)

This very prosaic statement is transformed into poetry by Stafford's:

It flickers in her mind to be good to me:
past cruelties come; the mind shies away.

Stafford's first line is perhaps closer to Wyatt than to Ghalib, but "flickers" is the kind of inspired choice which Stafford makes again and again, thereby turning his translations into fine poems: while those of the others remain at that pious level of compromise where the original is not too bruised and the rendering is not too daring either rhythmically or metaphorically. The English-language reader

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

will see something of Ghalib if he studies Mr. Ahmad's explanations assiduously enough; failing that, he will at least have the contentment of seeing what intelligble and moving English poems Stafford has made of some of the ghazals.

Ghalib himself had little regard for his Urdu poetry; although late in his life he delighted in the flexibility of the Urdu language, most of his Urdu poetry—it is astonishing to learn—had been written before he was twenty. He seems to have been a kind of Mozart in his precocious productivity. Persian was the language of poetry and of civilized discourse. His later Urdu poems are occasional verses and panegyrics presented to Nawabs, British officers, the Mughal king—anyone from whom Ghalib could expect a gift of money.

Hali, who befriended Ghalib in his last years, wrote the first biography, *Memoir of Ghalib,* which is highly esteemed in Urdu literature. Drawing upon Hali and translating and editing a vast body of the poet's letters, Ralph Russell and Khurshidul Islam have produced an admirable, scholarly and compellingly readable biography, *Ghalib 1797-1869, Volume I: Life and Letters.* The promised second volume is to be a selection of Urdu and Persian poetry in an English translation. The great virtue of Russell and Islam is that they let Ghalib speak for himself through his letters and his diary of the 1857 revolt, the *Dastambu.* They translate Hali as well as some letters that Ghalib received, using these as narrative connections between the letters. The scholarship lies in the editing, which is impeccable.

The Ghalib that emerges is wonderfully alive. "I am noticeably tall," Ghalib writes, ". . . and [in former days] my complexion was [unusually] fair, and people of discrimination used to praise it." Hali, who saw him in old age, recorded, ". . . one could easily see what a handsome man he had been. . . . Tall and broadly built, and with powerful limbs, he looked even then like a newcomer from Turan." He is a man of wit. Congratulating a friend on an appointment, he writes, "If only you had told me what salary you were receiving I should have known in what measure to congratulate you." He is very much conscious of his own worth as a poet and frequently expresses his bitterness at not having received his due.

> They say that in the days of [the Emperor Shahjahan], by that open-hearted sovereign's command [the poet] Kalim was time and time again weighed against silver and gold and pearls and rubies. I desire that you command men of discernment to flinch not from the toil and effort, and to weigh my poetry—not many times, but just once—against Kalim's verse.

The last quotation is from the preamble to the history of the Mughal kings that he wrote in Persian. It was written with the hope of advancement, but very soon he is complaining to a friend, "I cannot boast of anyone who appreciates my worth."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Although he wrote panegyrics, he was not a vain flatterer. Hali describes his fastidiousness and the intellectual honesty that were so important to him: "In our society it is the general rule that when a man recites his verse, every line—good or bad—is greeted with cries of approval, and no one distinguishes between a good line and a bad one. Ghalib's way was quite the opposite of this. No matter how revered and respected a poet might be, until he heard a line that he really liked he never on any account expressed appreciation."

It was unconventional behavior, and his contemporaries despised him for it, considering it the presumptuous affectation of one who had too high an opinion of his own poetry. Some poets who respected him, however, continued to send him their verses to the end of his life; he always gave them honest and detailed criticism, praising only when he was impressed; he was never politely evasive, did not care to give encouragement with a vague approbation. Thus, we see him writing to the poet Tufta: "Your word *'did-mast'* is a new invention. *I* understand what you mean, but you may depend upon it, no one else will. This is what they mean when they say 'The meaning is in the mind of the speaker'. . . . In all these verses there is nothing wrong—and nothing of interest." To another correspondent, he writes: "Men who make poetry all pluck the strings with a different touch and from each instrument bring forth a different melody. Pay no heed to what others see and feel, and bend all your efforts to increase your own perception."

Pay no heed. . . . We could almost be reading Ezra Pound, and there is certainly an intellectual resemblance. However, we see little of the private man. He married at the age of thirteen, and moved from Agra to Delhi where he lived for the rest of his life. His wife bore him seven children, but they all died in infancy. We know little else for the good reason that there is little to know, for the nineteenth-century Muslim society was (and continues to be a century later) male-oriented. When in his last years he had to leave a house, he looked for two adjacent houses, one of which would be the *zenana* or the abode of the women of the family. This was the order of Islamic society, and although Ghalib was ambiguous about religion, he kept outward appearances. Not that he was a hypocrite in this; for he made no secret of his love of wine and did not care who observed him eating and drinking during the month of Ramadan.

In 1856, he wrote a Persian ode in praise of Queen Victoria and requested Lord Canning to forward it to London. He hoped for a pension and in the accompanying letter pointed out to the Governor-General that in great civilizations poets were honored with pearls and gold. He received a typically British reply, that appropriate action would be taken after enquiries had been made. Ghalib needed the money desperately, but the revolt of 1857 put an end to his immediate expectations.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

His position at the time was extremely tenuous. He had been connected with the Mughal court and although on a visit to Calcutta he had admired British efficiency, he had deep-rooted reservations about the emerging new rulers. He began to write a diary, the *Dastambu,* choosing the relative obscurity of ancient Persian in which to do so. It is a vivid account of the horror and the suffering of the time, the brutality of the revolt, the murderous ruthlessness with which the British put it down, the chaos which prevailed, the famine and thirst which were endured. Yet, Ghalib has the objectivity with which to observe the humanity that the British possessed, so unlike all previous conquerors of India, for he notes that they "harmed not a hair on the head of any woman or child."

The letters of his last years are full of a poignant agony, a tragic tone. "I am a man devoted to one art. Yet by my faith I swear to you, my verse and prose has not won the praise it merited. I wrote it, and I alone appreciate it." At the very end, he received many anonymous letters in which he was abused in the foulest language for being a wine-drinker and an irreligious man. His response has a sense of high tragedy about it:

> I deserve that when I die my friends and kinsmen should blacken my face and tie a rope round my feet and exhibit me in all the streets and by-lanes and markets of Delhi, and then take me outside the city and leave me there for the dogs and kites and crows to eat—if they can bring themselves to eat such a thing.

Yet, his sense of humor did not desert him. A few days before his death, someone enquired after his health and he replied, "Why ask me how I am? Wait a day or two and then ask my neighbours."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

WILLIAM H. PRITCHARD

Paradise Lost

> Nearer to the end of the century than to those times, we think that imagined world of theirs old hat: a strange illusion since it was never colonized. A landing party or two set down, no more. Then the supply ships were scuttled, the effort faltered, some pilots were killed, others devoted long lives to catechizing a bitter lesson, each in an isolation from the others that 1914 could not have foreseen. Have we studied the manifestoes too often, and the flight plans that were never used? Or are we dulled by loudspeakers, or have we lost the capacity to participate in a hope? "The 20th century's early modernism," we yawn respectfully or indifferently. There have been so many modernisms. *That* period, we feel sure, played itself out. But it never played; its energies separated, some were cancelled by lead, its synergies faded amid the roar of field guns. What we feel so used to in retrospect, nearly convinced that we were *there* and found it meager, is like the memory of a TV program we cannot be bothered to interrogate.[1]

THE PURPOSE OF HUGH KENNER'S MASSIVE, brilliant study is to rouse us from our dogmatic slumbers. He sets himself to define, in painstaking and unfailingly lively detail, the forces that for an all-too-brief moment made up a Vortex of patterned energy dissipated by the first World War and attendant nuisances. But The Pound Era, we are to understand, did not end in 1914 or 1918; standing nearer to the end of the century than to its beginning, Kenner yet reminds us in the closing pages of the book that "The gods have never left us. Nothing we know the mind to have known has ever left us. Quickened by hints the mind can know it again, and make it new." The possibility, the promise, is that we can possess, by taking possession of what the mind knows—of what Pound's mind knew—a paradise within us, happier far. So the story is an elegiac one, but not a tale of woe; and the commentator never flags, never gives up the ship even for a moment, never is less than fully responsive to the challenge of his subject or to the reader who may be, here and there, ignorant, inert or unpersuaded.

This is all to the good, especially by contrast with some recent books on Pound's poetry which assume that all you need do is explicate and everything will come out right. Kenner's own explication is always in the service of making some murky matter a bit clearer: a chapter on Pound's use of a fragment of Sappho's at different moments in his career; a chapter ("Words Set Free") on ideograms and post-symbolist

[1] THE POUND ERA, by *Hugh Kenner*. University of California Press. $14.95. A handsomely designed book in every respect, and not overpriced.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

uses of language; chapters ("The Invention of Language," "The Invention of China") on Pound's making new of Provençal and of Li Po; a particularly valuable one taking us through "Imagism" with many new distinctions. All these discussions work in closest touch with particular cases, help us to see why it is not just empty jargon to go on about "patterned energies" in Pound's transformations of other poetries. Nor does Kenner, who twenty years ago published *The Poetry of Ezra Pound* (1951) and immediately became his most interesting critic, make the mistake of trying to rewrite the earlier book; thus *The Pound Era* contains very little on two poems which for readers who boggle at the *Cantos* are the height of Pound's achievement: "Homage to Sextus Propertius" and "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley"—evidently Kenner sees no need to reconsider his earlier excellent commentaries on them. But the 1951 book was also full of references, often of inestimable value to other writers, and particularly to Joyce, Eliot, and Lewis, the "Men of 1914." What Kenner has now done is to daringly extend his treatment of these writers—and of Ford, W. C. Williams, Marianne Moore, Beckett—by making them characters in a novel about the beginning, the flourishing (which it never quite did) and the fading to outward sight of a marvelous time.

Kenner makes use of every remembered anecdote, scrap of conversation, somebody's account to somebody else, much new material, by weaving them into a highly inflected narrative which is not averse to thrilling effects—as in this conclusion to the "Vortex Lewis" chapter, June 1914, constructed from a Pound broadcast anecdote about *Blast:*

> A new copy of *Blast,* puce, the size of a telephone directory lettered from corner to corner, lay on an aristocratic garden table. The summer day darkened. The rains commenced to fall. No one rescued it. Through a spattered pane wide aristocratic eyes saw in a sudden blazing lightning-flash the shocking pink cover start forth, the five fierce black letters, BLAST. Darkness recomposed. The dull rain fell and fell.
>
> Six weeks after *Blast* was published Europe was at war.

* * *

It is important to have a new paragraph for that single sentence about the war, while the three asterisks—a recurrent typographical device—speak vividly in signaling that there's no more to say. "The darkness drops again; but now I know/ That twenty centuries of stony sleep/Were vexed to nightmare . . ." If Kenner sometimes sounds like Van Wyck Brooks doing up Emerson at Concord, the risk is worth taking. "Literary history," words that depress immediately upon hearing, can be made new if the writer interrogates the past and makes it answer as vividly as it does here in 1914 and throughout the book.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Elegiac lyric at one extreme of tone; comic or satiric presentation at the other. In the *Pisan Cantos* Pound put them together in remembering Yeats when they lived together at Stone Cottage, in Sussex—"so that I recalled the noise in the chimney/ as it were the wind in the chimney"

> but was in reality Uncle William
> downstairs composing
> that had made a great Peeeacock
> in the proide ov his oiye
> had made a great peeeeeeecock in the . . .
> made a great peacock
> in the proide of his oyyee
>
> proide ov his oy-ee
> as indeed he had, and perdurable
>
> a great peacock, aere perennius

Nor are we to think of *Blast*'s "shocking pink cover" speaking forth volumes, without witty satisfaction mixed with regret in the tribute of remembrance. But Kenner also treats us to that part of literary life which, belonging to the history of publicity rather than literature, is summoned up to provide a parody of what Pound and the other Good Characters meant seriously. Some figures appear briefly and memorably, the following one apropos a review of the 1915 publication of *The Catholic Anthology,* in which appeared Eliot's "Prufrock":

> . . . Arthur Waugh in the *Quarterly Review* mentioned "anarchy" and "red ruin." He recalled the "classic custom" of instilling morality in young men by displaying a drunken slave; such, he thought, might be the use of "Prufrock" and the other poems in the anthology. Waugh's concern for family tone is understandable. He had a son Alec and a son Evelyn.

Some larger ones merit more than a brief bolt across the scene, especially if they are named Amy Lowell. Pound had sent Fenollosa's essay, "The Chinese Written Character," across the "torpedo-infested Atlantic" (1916) for hopeful publication in *The Monist;* of a sudden there appears the inventor of "Amygism" girding her loins to expose the shallowness of Fenollosa's and Pound's efforts:

> Meanwhile, in a crystal cloud above Brookline, Mass., far-darting Apollo was preparing to smite with an illumination Amy Lowell, the "hippopoetess," to argue with whom, Carl Sandburg once remarked, was "like arguing with a big blue wave." The lady in whose company she received the revelation was to undergo seven years'

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> nagging rather than argue. Moreover illuminations ran in the family. . . . In 1913, concurrent with the arrival of the January *Poetry,* another bolt was loosed: "Why, I too am an *Imagiste.*" She hied her twice from Massachusetts to the Imagist headquarters in London, crossing like a big blue wave or like Daisy Miller, in 1913 to join the movement and in 1914 (with maroon-clad chauffeur and matching auto) to appropriate it since she had not been properly accepted.

The hilarious chapter runs its course, a surprise in every sentence, and we end up feeling very good about Ezra Pound's virtue but also quite captivated by Amy Lowell's superlative bungling. And, appropriating Pound's phrase about Wyndham Lewis, it is only by means of Kenner's "highly energized writing" that ludicrous as well as affecting events get placed memorably before us.

So to the question which perhaps should have been raised earlier: does *The Pound Era* make us reconsider in detail and as a whole our attitudes towards the actual poems Pound wrote? Kenner refers twice to R. P. Blackmur in less than flattering ways, once as if he were the instigator of a silly, ungenerous attitude toward the poet: " 'He can only translate,' cavilled the school of Blackmur years later; and when the dog in the story walked on water, his inability to swim was remarked on." But one would hardly call Wyndham Lewis, in his own opinion personally responsible for the Vortex of 1914, a school-of-Blackmur critic; and it was Lewis who in *Time and Western Man* (1927) devoted a chapter to Pound titled "A Man in Love with the Past" which discussed the poetry in less than ecstatic terms. Blackmur's 1933 essay praised Pound at his best as "a maker of great verse rather than a great poet" and went on to argue that he "is everywhere a master of his medium so long as the matter in hand is not his own, is translation or paraphrase: everywhere else, whether in putting his translations together or in original material, the language has an air of solipsism and bewildered intent"; and that he has "by his raids upon ideograms and unsupported allusions, limited and dulled [the sensibility] of his poetry." There is no indication that Blackmur had read Lewis, yet a similar argument was made, without chapter and verse and in less elegant terms when under the general title "The Revolutionary Simpleton" Lewis termed Pound—because of his extraordinary capacity to get inside the skins of other men, earlier poets—"a kind of intellectual eunuch," going on to explain that

> . . . He has not effected this intimate entrance into everything that is noble and enchanting for nothing. He has really walked with Sophocles beside the Aegean; he has *seen* the Florence of Cavalcanti; there is almost nowhere in the Past that he has not visited; he has been a great time-trotter. . . .

But where the present was concerned, Lewis continued, Pound was

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

another matter, and if being a great poet were centrally a matter of speaking in a memorable voice about contemporary reality—Pound was something less than that poet.

I am not remonstrating with Kenner for playing down intelligently adverse criticism of Pound's work, although one remarks the significant absence of reference to such accounts, often largely or in part admiring of Pound, like Donald Davie's book, like the lively criticisms of Leavis or Winters, or like Blackmur's essay itself. But it should be made clear that it is no mere "school of Blackmur" that cavils at Pound, since some of the most interesting cavilling was done by Lewis, to an extent by Eliot and Yeats, and by William Carlos Williams ("I'll go on reading what I can and when a glimmer of brilliant exposition comes through the fog of your verbiage I hope I will still be alive to recognize it": (W.C.W. to E.P., 1956). Surely a book about The Pound Era could afford to give more play to the major characters when they respond to the head man in a not totally admiring way? The presence of such ambivalent responses would make less overwhelming Kenner's own tendency—with the exception of some qualifications about the bleaker stretches of the John Adams or Chinese *Cantos*—to make everything Pound wrote count as superb poetry. By not bothering to imagine interesting ways of resisting Pound, Kenner risks being patronized by those savants who know all about Pound's limitations though they haven't read a poem of his in years.

The other and trickier question one wants to entertain in reading and rereading this book goes something like, well, to what extent *was* it The Pound Era after all? If 1914, or 1918, or some instant in between signals the moment when paradise was lost, if after World War I the men of 1914 went their several ways, if the Vortex's valuable energies were somehow dispersed, diverted, cultivated in private, what then is the relation between Pound, Joyce, Eliot, Lewis, plus assorted followers or benefactors or imitators, and Other Writers who were never in the Pound Era at all and who appear almost not at all in Kenner's book?[2] In the middle of this book—a short second part called "Interregnum"—Kenner writes a marvelous chapter on "Privacies" which sets out to answer the question "Who were they?," then does individual portrails of the big four, after which the following conclusion:

> Multiple men each one of them, not double men as were the great Victorians, the personnel of the Vortex so people a movement that

[2] Stevens appears briefly three times ("An Edward Lear poetic, pushed toward all limits"); Lawrence once in passing; Frost twice ("now too quickly dismissed as an Eisenhower-poet") ; Crane once, disparagingly. On the other hand, Kenner seems quite serious in inviting us to admire the Objectivists (Louis Zukofsky, George Oppen, Charles Reznikoff, Carl Rakosi, Basil Bunting) as poets who understand the principle that poems are machines made out of words. Something seems wrong here.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

we hardly miss allies. Eliot's strange case is in one way paradigmatic: all of them, though they had not his misfortune, could speak a time in speaking their own lives, having been born each one in that decade, the 1880's, which came to maturity just before the War, and could therefore remember afterward what had been lost. An Auden (born 1907) was too young to manage stereoscopic vision: the world of which he became conscious was wholly post-war. A Ford (born 1873) or a Yeats (born 1865) was too old; after the war Ford lived on his memories, and Yeats as if nothing had occurred but Irish troubles.

Their destiny should have been to people the Vortex. Instead it was to maintain continuity. Civilization is memory, and after 1918 effective memory was almost lost.

"Their destiny should have been to people the Vortex." Either I do not understand the tone and intent of this sentence, or it says something very strange and perhaps sentimental too. To people the Vortex with others; to maintain, by their own creativity, the current of energies and ideas rushing into a center, drawing in whatever comes near. Instead Joyce spent the rest of his life writing *Finnegans Wake,* and how do we feel about that? Lewis wrote mockingly incisive criticisms of his old friends, while getting on with his own indefatigable prose and graphic works. Eliot, perhaps the most interesting case, became the literary spokesman of England, to the extent that Russell Kirk in his new book can refer to the 1920's-1950's as Eliot's age.[3] Yet Kenner has just reminded us, in speaking of Eliot, that "his life was bounded by the conditions of a miserable marriage, to a gifted woman of whom it was soon evident that her emotions were deranged, and hopelessly so;" and he invites us to read *The Waste Land* and *Ash Wednesday* in that light.

His miseries, in that iridescent verse that seems as particular as something seen and yet as omnipresent as sound, changed scale and shape after his marriage and filled a world apt for expressive symbiosis with misery. Yet has anyone, unaware of the private facts, ever suspected how many lines of *Ash Wednesday* simply meant what they said?

Very well; that is a challenging question. But if paradise was lost, the Vortex dispersed, then perhaps a different kind of art had to

[3] ELIOT AND HIS AGE, by *Russell Kirk.* Random House. $12.50. This readable but overlong account attempts both to chart the progress of Eliot's thought from 1917 on and to criticize the poems. Kirk is not well equipped to do literary criticism, and in general the view of Eliot is unfailingly admiring, but the ground is gone over thoroughly. Another recent book, *T. S. Eliot's Intellectual Development,* by John D. Margolis (University of Chicago Press) makes a careful study of that development from 1922 to 1939, mainly by quoting from and commenting on *The Criterion.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

result, very likely one that would draw upon and transform personal "miseries" into "expressive symbiosis." Joyce, always remote from the others, preoccupied himself with The Language; but Lewis for the rest of his life made his novels and polemics out of the scorn, frustration, high-spirited mockery and eventually self-critical castigation of a distinctive individual; Pound, in the years between the composition of *Mauberley* and his incarceration in the detention camp outside Pisa wrote the long poem which would be immeasurably less than it is without those redeeming cantos written with himself as Pisan victim and victor; Eliot, up through the poetry that culminates in *Little Gidding* did not cease from an exploration of the self through words which cannot be understood by invoking any myth like the Vortex. In view of these later works—*The Pisan Cantos, Four Quartets, Self Condemned* and *The Human Age,* who would lament that the men of 1914 ceased to turn out equivalents of *Lustra* or *Prufrock* or *Tarr*? Consider how little it was in fact—or even in fantasy—possible to people the Vortex with other writers who could somehow use to Art's advantage the achievements of these brilliant creations by clever young men in their early thirties. World War I or no, they *had* to move on, had to turn forty, move away from each other—at least so it now seems—and if not to create within themselves the paradise happier far, then something no less human and fallen.

Kenner knows all this; in particular the fineness of his writing on Eliot's and Lewis's later careers shows how acutely sympathetic he is to their post-Vortex art. But those careers, and to an extent Pound's as glimpsed through the *Pisan Cantos,* also reveal the limitations of early Poundian assertions like "Poetry is a sort of inspired mathematics" or "The Image is the poet's pigment" or any flashy Vorticist slogan, as reliable guides to what is there to care about in their mature work, patently in touch with miseries. And it is good to resist, in reading Kenner's chapter "The Sacred Places" (about Pound's use of European civilization's "luminous details") the tendency to believe that these really are The Sacred Places. There are, were other ones—somewhere North of Boston, or in Hartford or Bucks County, or behind one's father's cannery works near Cleveland, Ohio, or outside Nottingham. Even now someone (at Yale?) is surely preparing a book called *The Stevens Epoch,* heavily featuring Crane or Lawrence or maybe Allen Ginsberg, with less than devoted attention paid to Pound or Eliot and none at all to Wyndham Lewis. Without wishing Kenner's book one word different than it is, nor insisting that it is anything less than a great imaginative attainment, threatening again and again to eclipse the wild man from Idaho whose E(z)ra he has named and celebrated, we can admit with some exhilaration that the mapping out of modernism and its as yet unnamed successor has just begun.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

PATRICK CRUTTWELL

Must We Burn the Literary Critics?

IT SO HAPPENED THAT when I received Mr. Hobsbaum's book[1] for review, I had been engaged in an argument with my eldest daughter, who is a biologist specializing in the biological control of certain plants which become pests to agriculture; and what *she* said was: "What is the *use* of this literary criticism? Yet another book about Shakespeare? Another about Johnson? Another about what criticism is about? Who reads them, except the professionals who are making similar books themselves? What ordinary readers does it benefit, and if at all, how?"

These are, of course, familiar questions; we have all heard them, I imagine, from our scientific friends. The reasons for asking them are clear. The effects that the scientists produce are plain to see, factual, undeniable; and even if we reply that those effects may seem on occasions to be more harmful than beneficial to humanity, that is no answer, for it is due usually not to the work of the scientists themselves but to the misuse of it by non-scientists—politicians, generals, industrialists, and so on. Thus I learned from the same source that the great dam which the Russians, for political reasons, are building on the Nile for the Egyptians, is going to prove an unmitigated disaster for Egypt, since the flooding of great areas previously dry is spreading certain diseases into parts that were formerly free of them, and the upsetting of the river's seasonal rise and fall has virtually ruined the off-shore fishing at the Nile's delta. Probably, opined my daughter, these results had been foreseen, and expressed, but only in learned scientific articles, which the politicians had either never heard of or chose to ignore.

We are kidding ourselves if we think that my daughter's questions are easy to answer. Nothing is harder to prove than that good literature is good for humanity—unless it be the corollary, that bad literature is bad for it. Nothing is harder to demonstrate than the belief that the intensive critical, and especially academic, study of literature is beneficial to the commonweal. Yet if you believe that it *is*, if you think that criticism, the interpretation of worthwhile literature and the discriminating of it from literature that is not worthwhile, has a valuable purpose—if, that is, you are not prepared to accept a totally dilettante and hedonistic principle—you have to make some effort to prove your case on grounds not in themselves strictly aesthetic; you have to show that benefits moral and social *do* flow from these efforts. Innumerable critics, from Plato and Aristotle onwards, have made the attempt.

[1] THEORY OF CRITICISM, by *Philip Hobsbaum*. Indiana University Press. $8.50.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Some have simply given it up, as Plato appears to have done with his expulsion of the poets from his Republic. Some have produced psychological rationalizations of questionable meaning, such as Aristotle's "purging of the soul from pity and terror, by devising a *mimesis* of these emotions" or I. A. Richards' "When an old habit which has been welcoming a bad poem is revivified into a fresh formation, or a new limb which has grown to meet a good poem wakes into life, the mind clears, and new energy wells up . . . (*Practical Criticism,* p. 304)." Some, like most of the medieval or Victorian critics, have contented themselves with a simplistic equivalence between literature and life: what saves your soul in one is good in the other, what the mores of your society won't allow you to talk about, and compel you to pretend you never do, in life, mustn't be written about in literature. Most twentieth-century critics, warned by the errors of the past, are a good deal more cautious; but the result of their justified caution is usually the production of some criteria more in the nature of incantatory affirmations than meaningful statements, phrases like "life-enhancing" (I have used that one myself), or "refining the sensibility"; arguments that good literature "purifies the language of the tribe" (which, it is then implied but never proved, is somehow or other *good* for the tribe); or convictions that someone who is sensitive and discriminating about poetry will therefore (but that "therefore" also is never quite proved) be likely to find his sensitiveness and discrimination in other fields improved—a proposition one would very much like to believe, but which is not made easier to believe by a knowledge of the lives and personalities of actual critics and academic literati.

So my daughter's questions, I repeat, are not too easy to answer. Mr. Hobsbaum's *Theory of Criticism* is "yet another" attempt to answer them. It follows the principle of "first destroy, then try to rebuild on the ruins." The first six chapters are largely concerned with demonstrating, through a host of examples, first the extreme variability of critical responses to the same works or writers, and second the general unreliability of contemporary reactions (as seen through the verdicts of reviewers) to works which later ages decided were of major status—were classics, in fact. The first conclusions Mr. Hobsbaum seems to draw from his depressing survey are somewhat pessimistic—almost admitting, in fact, the doubts of my daughter. Right at the start, on the first page in fact, he asks the question: "Is rightness as a goal impossible to critics at large? in which case, criticism as an activity would be invalidated altogether." Later, having surveyed the wide range of disagreement about the value and interpretation of *Paradise Lost,* he concludes that the poem "demonstrably means different things to different people": which, if taken with his first conclusion, would seem to "invalidate" *all* criticism of that poem. And he observes also, having looked at the criticism of Fitzgerald, that critics "tend to write in their own moral preconceptions" (into their interpretations of that

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

writer): which again—since every man's "moral preconceptions" are different from every other man's—makes "rightness as a goal impossible" and criticism therefore "invalidated."

Then Mr. Hobsbaum turns to examples of how contemporaries reacted to major works of unusual originality, and the picture becomes even more depressing. From Jeffrey's denunciation of Wordsworth, and on through Victorian critics' misreadings of *Wuthering Heights* and *Moby Dick* (because they had expected anything which called itself, or looked like, a novel, to be more or less "realistic") and their ravings at Whitman, because of his sexual frankness and metre-less rhythm, he comes to his climax with a grim account of the reviewers' reception of Lawrence's *The Rainbow*. His earlier works, *The White Peacock* and *Sons and Lovers,* had been tolerably well received because each could be accommodated into an existing genre; the former could be taken as a piece of lyrical regionalism, something like a more rhapsodic Hardy, the latter as a realistic piece of social observation and autobiography. But *The Rainbow* fitted into no pre-existent framework, and its reception was a total disaster, leading, of course, to its suppression for obscenity.

So much for the "destructive" part of Mr. Hobsbaum's thesis. It is, undeniably, a rather selective picture. There is no lack of great writers who received very adequate recognition in their lifetimes. Shakespeare is the obvious example; there were also Pope, Johnson, Crabbe, Jane Austen and Dickens. I doubt, also, the proposition that "rightness as a goal" for "critics at large" *is* a necessary condition for the validity of criticism. It depends on what one means, in this context, by "rightness." If one means simply agreement, and agreement among critics of stature, then the goal does seem to be "impossible": witness the virtually total dismissal by Yvor Winters (a critic for whom Mr. Hobsbaum shows great respect) of all English poetry after the seventeenth century. "Rightness" in criticism, to my mind, need not mean even a measure of agreement even among a majority of the most distinguished critics; what it should mean is a basic consistency in the judgments of each individual critic, which demonstrates that his criticism is something more than a disconnected series of random verdicts but derives, instead, from a steady and reasoned philosophy of literature. The actual verdict arrived at is in fact less important than the way by which it was arrived at. Looked at in this way, even the wildest misjudgments by critics of stature have their own "rightness." Ben Jonson's "Shakespeare wanted art," for instance, Coleridge's admiration for the sonnets of Bowles and his ill-fated urging on Wordsworth to write "the first truly philosophical poem in the language," Henry James's denigration of the great Russian novelists, Eliot's over-valuing of the minor Elizabethan dramatists and his curious ambivalence about Milton: each of these, I believe, could be shown to have been the "right" judgment—in a way, the only possible judgment—for each critic to have pro-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

nounced in relation to his work as a whole and the particular point it had reached when the judgment was made. But that does not mean that *we* must either agree, or dismiss the critic, and criticism, altogether.

Moreover, it is rather futile to complain when a work of genuine revolutionary originality is badly received by most contemporaries: futile, and in a way tautological, since if it were well received, this in itself would prove that it was *not* revolutionary and original. Writers of such works do, in fact, "ask for it": some of them do so consciously—they know that their work will offend and be misunderstood—others are naively astonished at the uproar they provoke. What was wrong about the reception of *The Rainbow* was not the generally hostile treatment it received from the reviewers—some of whom, in fact, notably the one who wrote of "the sheer weight of its numbing monotony," seem to me to have made valid points against it—but the fact that it was suppressed on the ground of obscenity, so that the "common reader" was given no chance of finding if he agreed or disagreed with the reviewers' verdicts. Mr. Hobsbaum, though he thinks it a great novel, himself suggests the real point to be made against it: that "there is an anomaly in the very form" of it (what "pretends" to be a novel being in fact a symbolic and dramatic poem); and this, to my mind, is true of all Lawrence's full-length works, except, perhaps, *Sons and Lovers*. So the true wrongness of *The Rainbow*'s reviewers was not so much their hostility as the fact that their hostility was wrongly based—based on the score of the book's indecency—which in turn led to a wrong judicial decision.

Things cheer up a little with Mr. Hobsbaum's seventh chapter, at which point the "destruction" more or less ends and the attempt to build on the ruins begins. Mr. Hobsbaum begins his building by arguing that "differences of opinion among the critics may be more apparent than real" (though some of the differences he has been quoting have been very real indeed), and that it is possible to extract, even from these differences, a respectable consensus. He cites as an encouraging example that Keats's *Ode to a Grecian Urn* "has never been considered as anything but a masterpiece"; but unfortunately for this unqualified pronouncement, Yvor Winters maintained that it "fails as a whole," has some passages "a trifle foolish" and others "distinctly foolish," is at one point "ultimately preposterous," and ends in "magniloquent nonsense."[2] Hardly, then, a "masterpiece" for Winters! However, Mr. Hobsbaum sticks to his guns (perhaps he had forgotten that passage from Winters), and maintains that modern criticism, starting from Richards and Empson, has made the "major discovery" that "a poem can bear more than one possible interpretation." I agree with him here: it *has* made that discovery, and subsequent critics have exploited it to the *n*th degree, demonstrating *en masse* that a poem can bear (or have forced on it) a number of interpretations not merely

[2] *Forms of Discovery*, p. 180.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

more than one, but positively infinite. By this stage, Mr. Hobsbaum's "consensus" has become a singularly elastic concept; it seems to mean nothing much more than that a certain number of works (not many) have been regarded as masterpieces by a majority of critics—though for widely differing and often totally contradictory reasons. That seems a shaky basis for Mr. Hobsbaum's hopeful conclusion that this consensus may be "a possible test of value in literature." It is rather like saying that because we are all convinced that a certain lady is beautiful, we must all be in love with her.

The eighth chapter wrestles with that most intractable of critical problems: granted that great literature *does* have a beneficial moral effect, how does it achieve this? *King Lear* is Mr. Hobsbaum's example here: he cites the immense range of moral responses to that play, ranging from Swinburne's seeing it as blank atheistic pessimism, through the re-written "happy ending" of Nahum Tate, to Bradley's optimistic reading of the last scene as showing Lear dying happy and redeemed, which of course ignores both Kent's "all's cheerless, dark, and deadly" and Albany's "Our present business is general woe." Mr. Hobsbaum, as it seems to me, has a great gift for demonstrating how wildly critics disagree: but then, after a host of specimens which seem to point to nothing but a state of critical anarchy, he manages, like a conjuror, to produce a general law which brings us back to order. It is, in this case, the proposition that "the values of a work of literature, then, are nothing like so straightforward as an ethical imperative . . . the work of literature is not a system of precepts but a tragic example." That seems unexceptionable, though not exactly original. It is essentially a negative statement; it is saying simply that imaginative literature does not improve us morally as a sermon or homily is supposed to do—a point on which, I imagine, everyone would agree—but it hardly tells us how it *does* improve us.

Chapter Nine begins to be more constructive. Here, Mr. Hobsbaum puts forward the idea of what he calls "a group approach to criticism," and describes the efforts of a "creative writing group" which he founded in London. They were all poets; they all got together, and discussed each other's poems. I cannot say that the examples he cites of their conversations give a very encouraging idea of the "group approach." For one thing, taped conversations always look incoherent in print. Pages consisting of utterances like this—

> You see, if he isn't going to respond in that way—if he isn't going to, in other words, take up whatever gesture she's making towards him, that's a rebuff, you see, a rebuff back at her. Mind you, I think it's so ambiguous and obscure I wouldn't like to take that too far; I mean, I've just been working out in my mind while we've been talking a case for precisely the opposite of what I've been saying . . .

—pages of that kind of thing are scarcely illuminating. Moreover, the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

particular poems discussed don't seem to me sufficiently interesting—there isn't enough *in* them—to provoke rewarding discussion; the group would perhaps have done better to discuss some of those poems (not by themselves) which Mr. Hobsbaum says are universally admitted "masterpieces." They may well have been helping each other; I cannot see how they are helping the rest of us. But Mr. Hobsbaum has another idea, another way of making criticism a "group approach"; he suggests that critical magazines should never give a book to a single reviewer: "at least two reviews should be printed, and any serious differences compounded in later issues." I fear that Mr. Hobsbaum can never have visited the offices of any well-known periodical; if he had, he would have seen the enormous number of volumes sent in for review by hopeful publishers and the small minority which can get even *one* review. If they are to get "at least two reviews," followed by further discussion, the minority would become infinitesimal. And to whom, by the way, is to be given the enormous responsibility for picking out that tiny minority for such extended treatment? Dr. Johnson once observed, with justice, that a bad notice is better for an author than no notice at all: the number of indignant authors, considering themselves grossly neglected, would be more than doubled by Mr. Hobsbaum's procedure.

I feel, on this issue, that Mr. Hobsbaum tends to undervalue both the intelligence of readers and the integrity and humility of at least a respectable proportion of reviewers. No intelligent reader accepts without question the verdict of one reviewer; no responsible reviewer praises or condemns without giving both an adequate account of the work itself and reasoned arguments for his verdict. The cause of this undervaluing may perhaps be found in the eleventh and last chapter. (The tenth, which is something of a digression, demonstrates that "linguistics as a science" is useless for literary criticism: perfectly true, but whoever thought it was useful?) In this last chapter, Mr. Hobsbaum offers as his final consolation the hope "that readers of a certain ability should experience something of the same reaction to a given work if it is successful." "Readers of a certain ability" is a concept which comes close to Dr. Johnson's "common reader," on whose judgment the fate of all literary works must ultimately depend, or his praise of *Pilgrim's Progress* on the ground that it had enjoyed "the continued and general approbation of mankind." But it is significant to notice how Mr. Hobsbaum must immediately qualify *his* "common reader," and warn him of the traps which lie in his way to a true judgment. He lists the kinds of critics who are likely to fail, and the reasons for their failures: "when the professor becomes ossified, the young academic pusillanimous, the reviewer idle, the journalist superficial, the layman torpid, the student childish, the public at large quiescent." Dr. Johnson felt no need for such elaborate qualifications; he could think of the common reader as a member of a unified body, not as an assortment of disparate types. Moreover, it may be noted that of the seven types of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

failure Mr. Hobsbaum picks out, three belong to the academic world: which is hardly complimentary to the academic study and criticism of literature which he himself practises—and practises, it is clear from his own work, with the greatest seriousness and conviction of its importance.

I found this work eminently worth reading; it is seriously conceived and coherently argued, and it obviously derives from a wide and responsible reading of literature and criticism. But its ultimate effect is curiously ambiguous. What it stands for—what it aims at demonstrating—is that literary criticism *is* a valid and useful activity, and that it is so because a certain "consensus" can be arrived at. But by far the greater part of it is devoted to the production of evidence which seems to point to exactly the opposite conclusions, and any reader impatient with literary criticism could find ample ammunition to support him. I shall certainly keep it out of the hands of my scientific daughter.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

JAMES P. DEGNAN

Fiction Chronicle[1]

By establishing himself as the scourge of an establishment long overdue for a scourging, Kingsley Amis, in his early novels—preeminently in *Lucky Jim*—proved himself, fifteen or so years ago, the funniest and, in many ways, the most original and satirically important novelist writing in English. In the comically outraged voice of his angry young heroes—e.g., Jim Dixon of *Lucky Jim* and John Lewis of *That Uncertain Feeling*—Amis lampooned what C. P. Snow later labeled the "traditional culture," the "culture of the literary intellectuals," of the "gentleman's world," by raising such sacrilegious questions as: Aren't you sick of the Sitwells? Aren't you sick of the Bloomsbury, the Gertrude Stein people? Of the Kierkegaard people? Of the Neo-Catholics? Of the Graham Greene, the Chesterton, the Léon Bloy, the François Mauriac people? Of the "danger of the intellect, wisdom of the blood" people? Of people who revere the Middle Ages? Of the cultural fascists and anti-semites? Of the Ezra Pound, the Wyndham Lewis, the T. S. Eliot people? Of the Southern Agrarian people? Of people who invariably prefer the European to the American product? Of people who invite you to parties where you are forced to listen to madrigals and counter tenors? Of the folk singing people, the recorder playing people, the return to the soil people, the beard and beret people, the "abroad loving" people? Of people who make a profession of being eccentric? Of people who spend their lives rehearsing spontaneity? Of people who, having proclaimed themselves "artists" or "sensitive souls" or "non-conformists," claim a special right to misbehavior: to being, among other things, rude, boorish, obnoxious and cruel?

What was original, in large part, about the early Amis hero—the Lucky Jim type—was that he overturned a major convention of twentieth-century literature: the convention of the hero as "sensitive soul," the convention of the "alienated" young man of artistic or philosophical pretentions struggling pitifully and hopelessly against an insensitive, middle-class, materialistic world. It is a convention that we see regularly in the work of major British and American writers: e.g., in Joyce and Lawrence and Wyndham Lewis; in Faulkner

1 GIRL, TWENTY, by *Kingsley Amis*. Harcourt Brace *Jovanovich*. $5.95. THE BOOK OF FLIGHTS, by *J. M. G. Le Clezio*. Atheneum, $6.95. ONE HAND CLAPPING, by *Anthony Burgess*. Alfred A. Knopf. $5.95. AN ACCIDENTAL MAN, by *Iris Murdoch*. The Viking Press. $7.95. THE WAY IT IS NOW, by *Sallie Bingham*. The Viking Press. $6.50. SUMMER SITUATIONS, by *Ann Birstein*. Coward, McCann & Geoghegan. $5.95. DOCTOR BRODIE'S REPORT, by *Jorge Luis Borges*. E. P. Dutton. $5.95. MURIEL, by *George P. Elliott*. E. P. Dutton. $5.95.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and Hemingway and Fitzgerald and Wolfe and (with a twist) in Henry Miller; in Virginia Woolf and Evelyn Waugh and Graham Greene. Although there is obviously justification for the convention, far too often, as Amis' satire demonstrates, according to the convention, the "sensitive soul" *because* he is "alienated" is portrayed as somehow possessing certain inalienable rights—the main one being the right to disregard other peoples' rights, the right to misbehave. Usually eccentric, neurotic, bohemian, irresponsible and self-centered, often a bully and a criminal, sometimes downright homicidal, the "sensitive soul" in modern English literature is typified by such heroes as Septimus in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*; Pinkie in Graham Greene's *Brighton Rock*; Sebastian in Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited*; and (though he is an older version) Gulley Jimson of Joyce Cary's *The Horse's Mouth*.

Amis, in his early satirical novels, overturns the convention by making of the "sensitive soul" a villan rather than a hero, by showing him up for what he so often is: a fraud; pompous, perverse, deceitful, arrogant, talentless, selfish, humorless, muddled and mean. In place of the "sensitive soul" as hero, Amis creates in his early novels a hero radically new to serious contemporary fiction: a middle-class hero who is also an intellectual, an intellectual who is unabashedly middlebrow. He is a hero who is decent, likeable and healthy; a self-deprecating hero whose chief virtues, as he expresses them, are: "politeness, friendly interest, ordinary concern and a good natured willingness to be imposed upon"; a hero possessed of a talent—shrewd and often wildly comical—for satire and mimicry, yet possessed at the same time of a scrupulous, an almost puritanical sense of moral responsibility. Respectful of marriage, disdainful of the upper classes' easy toleration of adultery, suspicious of all pretentiousness, of all heroic posturing, the Amis hero, to quote the critic, Martin Green, voices all that is best of the "lower middle class, of the non-gentlemanly" conscience.

Outraged by the anti-democratic, anti-rational, anti-middle class sensibility and cliches of the traditional culture, of the "culture of the literary intellectuals," of the "gentleman's world," the hero of the early Amis satires is a hero who dares to champion such "bourgeois" values as common sense, rationality, democracy, humanism and humanitarianism; a hero who dares to say, in a distinctive voice of comic, exasperated rage, something like: Thank God for the twentieth century. Thank God for cocktail parties and facts and newspapers and good plumbing and dentistry and polio vaccine and a seventy plus life expectancy; for jazz and martinis and good-looking, fashionable girls; for bars and golf and the working man's right to thoroughly misuse his new found leisure. Thank God for the middle class, for good manners, for people who make an effort to dress and speak and behave decently; for "the normal." Thank God for

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

democracy, for common sense, for George Orwell and popularizations of knowledge.

For articulating such heresy the Amis hero was, of course, labeled by various spokesmen for the traditional culture—by, for instance, V. S. Pritchett and Somerset Maugham—as, among other things, anti-intellectual. Other, more perceptive critics—e.g., Walter Allen—however, pointed out that the Amis hero was not anti-intellectual, but a new kind of intellectual, an intellectual deriving from T. H. Huxley rather than from Ruskin and Carlyle; from, to quote Allen, "George Orwell and Dr. Leavis and the Logical Positivists" rather than from Mr. Eliot and the Bloomsbury people. What critics like Allen realized was that the early Amis hero was not attacking the intellectual-artistic life per se, but aspects of that life that had long been decadent, phony and vicious.

Because I very much admire Amis' early novels, it has saddened me over the fifteen years or so since those novels appeared to witness the steady decline in the quality of Amis' work, a decline that began dramatically with Amis' fifth novel, *One Fat Englishman,* published in 1964, and that reaches, I hope, bottom in his newest novel: *Girl, 20* —a bad novel by any standard and Amis' worst book by far.

In part, the decline I am talking about can be attributed to Amis' obviously increasing indifference over the years to the simple art of telling a good story, of achieving verisimilitude. Amis has never been a careful writer; in fact, part of the charm of his early novels is that they fly in the face of the New Criticism, of Percy Lubbock-Henry James, Inc., by managing to be fine novels that are not "well made." What was once a charm, however, has become a bore. In *Girl, 20,* for example, there is page after page of inexcusably amateurish, sloppily contrived, inept prose; page after page of phony philosophizing (on male menopause and other related and unrelated subjects) trying to masquerade as realistic conversation. The early Amis, at his sloppiest, could never have written anything so unconvincing, so downright bad.

More than indifference to craft, more than sloppiness, however, what accounts for the drastic decline in the quality of Amis' satirical fiction is the attenuation and—in some cases—the disappearance from that fiction of the hero we've been discussing: the Lucky Jim type. Indeed, with the appearance of Amis' fourth novel, *Take a Girl Like You,* the Amis hero begins turning into the kind of anti-hero —e.g., blase, irresponsible, hedonistic—that Amis' first three novels attack; and, in *One Fat Englishman,* a sloppy and pointless farce, the transformation becomes complete.

Without the Lucky Jim type (or an adequate substitute, which substitute Amis has yet to find) Amis' satire—and this is certainly the case in *Girl, 20*—loses the moral seriousness and moral core that made his early comic satires so original and important. To be sure,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

in *Girl, 20,* Amis does satirically get at targets that need getting at, many of them relatively current versions of the targets he got at in his early novels. He gets at, for example: the various proponents of the "youth culture," at those (especially the aging liberal intellectuals) who pretend that, from the yawp of rock and the haze of dope, "youth" has discovered "something more momentous than Christianity"; he gets at the imbecilic rudeness of the "doing your own thing" people; he gets at the Tim Leary, Herbert Marcuse, Norman O. Brown, Charles Reich people; he gets at those who, having "totally" rejected the "structure of society," are the first to cry for fire and police protection; and he gets at addlepated white liberals who support various of the black militants despite the anti-semitism and reverse racism of such militants. But the satire of *Girl, 20* comes off, at best, as half-hearted and trivial; and this is so largely because the protagonist of the novel—Douglas Yandell, a thirty-four year old music critic, is, in contrast to the Lucky Jim type, himself half-hearted and trivial—a protagonist who simply couldn't care less. The great distinction of the early Amis satire is that it offers us, in the Lucky Jim type, a clear alternative to what is being attacked. In *Girl, 20,* however, (as in other of Amis' later satires), it is difficult to see that in Yandell, cynical, promiscuous, world weary, vaguely corrupt, Amis is offering much that is preferable to what he is attacking. Further, and of more aesthetic importance, unlike the early Amis novel in which the objects of Amis' satire are of compelling interest because they are central to the moral development and destiny of the hero, central, that is to say, to the story—e.g., the intellectual fakes and boors seriously jeopardized (if always in a comic way) the career, the marriage, the moral well-being of the early Amis hero—in *Girl, 20,* the objects of Amis' satire are of only peripheral concern to Douglas Yandell, minor irritants rather than sources of the great comic rage that was the hallmark of the Lucky Jim type. Indeed, so loosely related to the protagonist are the objects of Amis' satire in *Girl, 20* that they come off frequently as merely incidental to the story—as undigested details arbitrarily tossed in from Amis' notebook.

Girl, 20 (a title taken from one of the sexual service newspaper ads, i.e., "Wanted, Girl, 20") is the tedious account by Yandell of the sexual affairs of his friend, Sir Roy Vandervane, an eccentric fifty-four-year-old symphony conductor who, as he ages, chases after younger and younger women to the feigned consternation of his masochistic wife, Kitty. Sir Roy's daughter sleeps with Sir Roy's Negro chauffeur. Yandell, when he's not sharing Sir Roy's daughter with the chauffeur, shares a mistress with another man whom, thank God, we never meet. Really, it is all rather joyless and decadent and unfunny; and what you have, finally, is the parody of a once great comic talent.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

J. M. G. Le Clezio's *The Book of Flights*—novel? anti-novel?—oh well, to quote the blurb (by far the most interesting, and the *only* coherent part of *Flights*), "*flight* . . . not merely from the conventions of the novel" but "flight in time and space . . . from reality and the prison of self" and, well, you get the idea—is one of those awful collections of pretentious trash—e.g., of "free ranging meditations, exclamations," and so forth—that remind one of William Burroughs and Grove Press and the worst (not to mention some of the best) of Lawrence Durrell. (It is exactly the kind of "experimental" nonsense that the early Amis loved to lampoon.) Called by *Newsweek* critic Saul Maloff "one of the most prodigiously gifted writers of his generation," Mr. Le Clezio, now in his early thirties, has written four other books, novels, it seems, about "being human and young and," oh dear me, "not wanting to be either."

Flights concerns the flights—real? imaginary? what, after all, does it matter?—of Young Man Hogan, not John Hogan or Ben or Bill, just Young Man or "*the* person called Hogan." Anyway, Young Man does and says things in the course of *Flights* (a book whose 319 pages conclude on a note that sounds mightily like a threat—"to be continued") which obviously constitute what the extraordinarily imaginative blurbist calls "metaphysical lyricism of great beauty." Once, for instance, "planting himself on his two feet," Young-Man-*the*-person called-Hogan, "tries to bend his shadow upward" (not downward, mind) "in the direction of the sun." Once, addressing the reader in a postscript to a chapter—a chapter that has absolutely nothing to do with water or glasses or bottles—Young Man says: "Nothing easier than pouring a little water from a bottle into a glass. Go on. Try it. You'll see." But, ultimately, it is in the "metaphysical lyricism" of his remarks on the nature of writing and of literature that Mr. (Young-Man-the-person) Le Clezio hits that thing you dread to see him hit—his stride. Writing a book, he informs us, is the *same* thing—not a thing analogous to—but the *same* thing as "contemplating the slow sprouting of a dried bean in an earth filled jam jar" or of brushing your teeth. Had he chosen to do either of these, he tells us, he would not have had to write *Flights,* since he would have been doing exactly the *same* thing as writing *Flights.* One can only wonder: why didn't he?

Read immediately after *Flights,* the new novels of Anthony Burgess and Iris Murdoch—respectively, *One Hand Clapping* and *An Accidental Man*—strike the reader as works of classic greatness, though viewed from something resembling a proper perspective—i.e., as far away, "in time and space," from *Flights* as one can possibly get—neither novel is really up to the author's best. Both, however, are competent, readable, and funny. Like Amis, Mr. Burgess and Miss Murdoch, at their best, are fine comedians, a literary talent I admire —perhaps to excess—in an age of flourishing solemn fakes like J. M. G.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Le Clezio, because it is a literary talent impossible to fake. It is rather like being able to draw realistic pictures well before going in for painting abstractions. Of the two novels, *One Hand Clapping,* perhaps because it is considerably less ambitious, is, I think, the more successful as a well-told story. A tour de force from Burgess' middle period —1961—it is the story of Howard Shirley, an uneducated, lower-middle-class, young Englishman whose photographic memory makes it possible for him to win a small fortune on a British television quiz show—a show much like the American one made infamous by Charles Van Doren ten years or so ago. Told from the point of view of Howard's vulgar and ignorant (but not stupid) young wife—a point of view that enables Burgess to get in some funny and trenchant comments on contemporary British and American manners and morals—*One Hand Clapping* is easy to read and almost always entertaining. It is only when, for instance, Burgess allows the young wife to speak in a much more sophisticated and philosophical way than is credible for her that the novel, striking a dishonest note, stalls.

Burgess' tightly sustained point of view is notably what is lacking in Miss Murdoch's *An Accidental Man,* an ambitious novel that contains some splendid writing, but a novel that too soon grows tedious because of Miss Murdoch's narrative method—a method that consists in having the same story told from various (in this case, far too many) points of view. We see, for example, the pathetic-comic "accidents" in the life of Austin Gibson Grey, the "accidental man" of the title, told from the points of view of members of two families (the Gibson Greys and the Tishbournes) involved in various ways with this man. What happens is that Miss Murdoch often gets trapped into a good deal of needless repetition and, at times, her characters all begin to sound the same. Told perhaps from two or three points of view, the story might work well; but, told from the many Miss Murdoch often employs, it gets tiresome.

There are, though, to repeat, some fine things in Miss Murdoch's new novel. Her powers of description are as strong and devastating as ever. Austin Gibson Grey, for example, is described as having a face that "creams and mantles like a standing pond." And Miss Murdoch's talent for consistently creating brilliantly comic conversations—a talent that consists in large part, as does that of Evelyn Waugh, in the perfect yoking of the absurd and the realistic—is still much in evidence. A minister explaining to a bereaved family why he is late in arriving to attend a dying member of that family: "I was at Youth Club, it's Ping-pong night." Or the headmistress of a school for young girls explaining to the older sister and guardian of a young girl being dismissed from the school: "I am afraid your sister attracts poltergeists."

After Miss Murdoch's brilliant comic touches, the humorless *Summer Situations*—three academic novellas by Ann Birstein—is dreary

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

stuff indeed. Usually, I am a great fan of academic fiction; I read it with the same undiscriminating enthusiasm some people bring to the reading of detective stories; but *Summer Situations,* I found difficult not to put down. In part, the dreariness can be attributed to the book's always predictable characters—bitchy, selfish, whining academic females and castrated, neurotic academic males—all of whom are uniformly unlikable. Mainly, though, the dreariness of the book derives from Miss Birstein's negligible narrative talent; from her needless, unconvincing and undramatic repetition of episodes and scenes. In the novella, "How I Spent My Summer Vacation," for example—the story of a child of divorce spending part of his summer vacation with his father and his father's new wife—Miss Birstein, in conversation after conversation between the husband and wife, repeats what one such conversation should have gotten out of the way once and for all. Books about dull and pointless people need not be dull and pointless books: *Summer Situations* is.

Although the stories in Sally Bingham's *The Way It Is Now* in some ways fall into the "whiny" category of Miss Birstein's, there is far less bitchery in them and infinitely more evidence of narrative talent. What Miss Birstein cannot accomplish in a sixty-five page novella, Miss Bingham can often accomplish in a ten-page story. Particularly good examples of Miss Bingham's narrative art are the stories "Mourning," "August Ninth at Natural Bridge," and "A New Life." In addition to her superior gift for narration, Miss Bingham has another necessary literary gift that Miss Birstein lacks: an eye for the definitive detail. In the story "August Ninth at Natural Bridge," for example, the vacation area known as Natural Bridge, an area "beautiful" to the parents and younger brothers of a teen-age girl who has not wanted to come along on the vacation, is seen by the girl in this way: "The pine forest, browning in the sun, lay like a mangy hide over the hills, and higher up, Natural Bridge, a lump of stone, hung suspended in the glare." The main problem with Miss Bingham's stories is their thinness of experience—a thinness that makes her sound at times—e.g., in stories like "The Facts of Life" and "Conversations"—almost desperate to contrive something to say.

For those who enjoyed Jorge Luis Borges' earlier collection of stories in English translation—*The Aleph and Other Stories*—his new slim collection of eleven pieces—*Doctor Brodie's Report*—should be welcome. Whatever one might say about these stories, one certainly can't accuse them of "thinness of experience." In characteristic Borges fashion, they are full of passion and blood and gore; of betrayals and conspiracies and duels and murders and suicides; there is even a crucifixion. That Borges is a fine craftsman is undeniable. That when he is good he is very good, accomplishing clearly his stated aim of telling classic stories plainly and briefly, is obvious. But, not infrequently, the stories in *Brodie,* as well as in *The Aleph,*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

strike me as superficial, as surface renderings that fail to capture the genuine complexity of human motivations. This, I guess, is the main reason why I find it difficult to understand how critics have given Borges the major critical reputation he now unquestionably enjoys in England and America.

George Elliott's new novel, completely unlike most of his fiction, is full of interesting, nostalgic detail from rural America of the early twentieth century. *Muriel* is the story, from childhood to old age and impending death, of a typical nineteenth-century, puritan, Victorian, Mid-Western, genteel farm lady and her family. It is an interesting piece of Americana, tracing the journey of Muriel and her family from the time of World War I through the Korean War and from a Mid-Western farm to the grape country of California's Napa Valley. *Muriel,* in many respects, is a slight book that sometimes seems more outline than novel, and, certainly, it is not comparable in importance to Elliott's major works, e.g., *Parktilden Village* and *Among The Dangs.* But it is a touching and sometimes a powerful little story (Muriel's impending death is beautifully done); and it is obviously the work of a real professional, a characteristic that, in an age of J. M. G. Le Clezios and Ann Birsteins, is very much to be welcomed.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

MARVIN MUDRICK

Here They Are

ALLON SCHOENER'S BOOK[1] IS DEDICATED "To my father, who was a Lower East Side boy, and to my mother, who, as I did, learned about the Lower East Side from my father." Schoener had been asked by The Jewish Museum to set up an exhibition on the great source and forcing-bed of twentieth-century American-Jewish life:

> I was born and raised in Cleveland; I never knew the Lower East Side until I went to college. When I came to New York on weekends from New Haven, I found myself roaming around Delancey Street and Second Avenue eating food that my mother had never cooked and trying to find the world of my father's youth. By the time I started to look, it was gone. The exhibition and book have permitted me to explore this vanished world in libraries and archives. . . .

It took only two generations for the Jewish Lower East Side to materialize as if by teleportation from Eastern Europe, flourish like the New Jerusalem, and disappear utterly into legend and now into archeology. (Jews don't stay put, they're here today and somewhere else tomorrow, pillar to post, fire to frying-pan, whether from Delancey Street to suburban split-levels and Park Avenue condominiums or at the turn of the century—the Cossacks' horses breathing down their necks in 661 devastated Russian ghettos during the black year of 1905-6—from Kishinev and all the *shtetlach* over the waves to Delancey Street. Till Hitler they had the habit of keeping one jump ahead.) To retrieve a sense of the milieu as it was, Mrs. Manners' chatty account[2] concentrates less on the Russian-Jewish greenhorns in the tenements than on the rich, Americanized German-Jews from uptown who intercepted them just this side of Customs and at once began maneuvering (and spending!) to coax them out of the poverty, Russian radicalism, and especially Jewishness that were a scandal to the Gentiles. Portal to America is more panoramic, and Schoener's method, deriving from its origin in the exhibition he assembled, is documentary: to let the whole story be told, schematically at least, without explicit editorial comment, by the contemporary statements (mostly newspaper articles) and photographs he selects and arranges for the purpose. One of the pieces

[1] PORTAL TO AMERICA: THE LOWER EAST SIDE 1870-1925, edited by *Allon Schoener*. Holt Paperback. $5.95.

[2] POOR COUSINS, by *Ande Manners*. Coward, McCann & Geoghegan. $8.95.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

he includes is taken from Hutchins Hapgood's recently reprinted[3] pioneer book on the New York ghetto (first published in 1902). Hapgood was a conscientious, sympathetic, and penetrating observer; he did the research and respected his subject, unlike a more famous American, who didn't scruple to practice his hit-and-run impressionism on a subject about which he knew nothing except that it frightened and repelled him.

Two years after the publication of *The Spirit of the Ghetto,* which would have been a useful book to seek out and ponder if one hadn't been an impressionist, Henry James came back home (on a ship that doubtless carried, seven decks below, a thousand refugees from the latest pogrom) and registered the impression that, while he sojourned all unaware abroad, the Jews had slithered in and taken over the Lower East Side. Words were called for. The appalled impressionist, dictating the New York section of *The American Scene* with one eye on his stockpile of vivid metaphors and the other on the Protocols of the Elders of Zion, had no choice but to bait the Jews for their Jew trick of coupling and *breeding* like BUGS wherever, as in his cherished old New York, they happened, by the momentary inadvertence of the elect, to be allowed to live: "There is no swarming like that of Israel when once Israel has got a start, and the scene here bristled, at every step, with the signs and sounds, immitigable, unmistakable, of a Jewry that had burst all bounds."

It was a bitter scene and a yet more bitter prospect: "the Hebrew conquest of New York" (upward and outward from Delancey Street), and the Babel of "ethnic" accents that threatened the very spelling of the English language (the Jews with their "all-unconscious impudence" were "the agency of future ravage," the East Side cafés were "torture-rooms of the living idiom"). Luckily, though, this all-unconscious social cretin and political provocateur found Central Park so seductive that he was occasionally—"in the happiest seasons, at favouring hours"—able to suppress his shudder of revulsion at the mere idea of sharing its rustic pathways with a rubbish of "superfluous" sheenies:

> The strange thing, moreover, is that the crowd, in the happiest seasons, at favouring hours, the polyglot Hebraic crowd of pedestrians in particular, has, for what it is, none but the mildest action on the nerves. The nerves are too grateful, the intention of beauty everywhere too insistent; it "places" the superfluous figures with an art of its own, even when placing them in heavy masses. . . .

James, innocent of economics and religion, couldn't have had the

[3] THE SPIRIT OF THE GHETTO, by *Hutchins Hapgood.* Funk and Wagnalls. $5.00. Harry Golden's preface and notes to this "new edition" are as cheerful and anecdotally informative as his writing usually is, as peripheral to the subject as, say, a nightclub routine by Sammy Davis, Jr., and, in their uncomprehending intrusions on Hapgood's sustained thoughtfulness, an insult to the book they presume to extend and elucidate.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ordinary motives for objecting to Jews; but, *grand seigneur* of literary milliners, he was all taste and condescension, nerves, and it wasn't only Jews who didn't measure up on the American scene, it was also "the Italians, who, over the whole land, strike us, I am afraid, as, after the Negro and the Chinaman, the human value most easily produced" (scraped free of the customary Jacobite cholesterol, what James meant was that, just as the Jews had too much individuality to interest a man of taste, so such poor neutral creatures had too little). This man of taste who, as late as 1880 (in *The Portrait of a Lady*), could diagnose in three words the "bare, familiar, trivial" music of the organ-grinder Verdi may even have been capable, every blessed night before beddy-bye, of whispering "kike, nigger, dago, chink" into his tall silk hat as he removed it tenderly from over his tucked-in jackass-ears.

"The Jewish quarter of New York," writes Hapgood in his Foreword to *The Spirit of the Ghetto,* "is generally supposed to be a place of poverty, dirt, ignorance and immorality—the seat of the sweatshop, the tenement house, where 'red lights' sparkle at night, where the people are queer and repulsive." Hapgood, however, wasn't an evangelist, a theoretician, or a man of taste:

> That the ghetto has an unpleasant aspect is as true as it is trite. But the unpleasant aspect is not the subject of the following sketches. I was led to spend much time in certain poor resorts of Yiddish New York not through motives either philanthropic or sociological, but simply by virtue of the charm I felt in men and things there. East Canal Street and the Bowery have interested me more than Broadway and Fifth Avenue. Why, the reader may learn from the present volume—which is an attempt made by a Gentile to report sympathetically on the character, lives and pursuits of certain East Side Jews with whom he has been in relations of considerable intimacy.

While he was writing the essays that eventually became the book, Hapgood worked as a reporter for Lincoln Steffens on the *Commercial Advertiser.* Another reporter on the paper, and a close friend of Hapgood's, was Abraham Cahan, already the author of the prototypic novel of Jewish immigrant life, *The Rise of David Levinsky,* later for many years editor of the *Jewish Daily Forward* and the most influential and most knowledgeable citizen of the New York ghetto. Steffens himself at the time, according to his *Autobiography,* "was almost a Jew. I had become as infatuated with the Ghetto as eastern boys were with the wild west, and nailed a mazuza on my office door; I went to the synagogue on all the great Jewish holy days; on Yom Kippur I spent the whole twenty-four hours fasting and going from one synagogue to another." So Hapgood, a young man from Harvard, had much encouragement and guidance; but he made the most of his opportunity.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

His Foreword is misleadingly modest: "certain East Side Jews" turn out to be a large, various, passionate, and busily intellectual community of rabbis, philosophers, poets, playwrights, actors, journalists, writers of fiction, and eccentrics whom Hapgood writes about with the (indeed) "considerable intimacy" of no outsider at all but a member of the family, a colleague, a friend, a *landsmann,* and a distinguished critic and social observer. In *The American Scene* James mentions having shown up once, briefly, at a Yiddish play till he was driven off forever by the smell of the multitude—"a scent, literally, not further to be followed." Hapgood seems to have watched and studied for years every play and player in the endless repertoire of the three Yiddish theaters on the Bowery: his descriptions and distinctions are lively and evocative; moveover, he is able to persuade us that what went on in these theaters must have represented, consistently, a level of committed intelligence putting to shame the dilution of a dilution of a genteel Anglo-Saxon theater uptown that it was James's unfulfilled dream of glory to make good in.

The Yiddish theater could try anything because its audience was everybody—"the sweatshop woman with her baby, the day laborer, the small Hester Street shopkeeper, the Russian-Jewish anarchist and socialist, the ghetto rabbi and scholar, the poet, the journalist." Hapgood describes the actor Jacob Adler playing an idiot boy in Jacob Gordin's *Wild Man:*

> The poor fellow is filled with the mysterious wonderings of an incapable mind. His shadow terrifies and interests him. He philosophizes about life and death. He is puzzled and worried by everything; the slightest sound preys on him. Physically alert, his senses serve only to trouble and terrify the mind which cannot interpret what they present. The burlesque which Mr. Adler puts into the part was inserted to please the crowd, but increases the horror of it, as when Lear went mad; for the Elizabethan audiences laughed and had their souls wrung at the same time. The idiot ludicrously describes his growing love. In pantomime he tells a long story. It is evident, even without words, that he is constructing a complicated symbolism to express what he does not know. He falls into epilepsy and joins stiffly in the riotous dance. The play ends so fearfully that it shades into mere burlesque.
>
> This horrible element in so many of these plays marks the point where realism passes into fantastic sensationalism. The facts of life in the ghetto are in themselves unpleasant, and consequently it is natural that a dramatic exaggeration of them results in something poignantly disagreeable. The intense seriousness of the Russian Jew, which accounts for what is excellent in these plays, explains also the rasping falseness of the extreme situations. . . .

The *Russian* Jew. It's necessary to emphasize, as Hapgood's evidence

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

reminds us often, that, apart from their religion, these Jews are almost as Russian as they are Jewish: their literary and theatrical mode is a realism that Anglo-Saxon gentility found indecorous, their literary models are Tolstoy and Chekhov (and very likely, though Hapgood doesn't name him, Dostoevsky); their politics is Russian anarchism and socialism, which they argue interminably in cafés over tumblers of Russian tea. But the special pathos of their culture is that it is all too Jewish—bound up in a Teutonic "jargon" with fifty-seven different varieties of pronunciation and words pilfered from everywhere, a language at home nowhere in the world outside the immigrant's house, and that cannot survive the vivacity and ambition of the children of those who will be the last to speak it as the language of their bosom. The pathos is summed up, as Hapgood points out, in the brief history of the Yiddish stage and in the career of one of its actors, Zelig Mogalesco. The Yiddish theater was founded in Rumania in 1876, and Mogalesco was the first Yiddish actor; now (in 1901), in his forties, he is the best comedian of the New York Yiddish theater. He has seen "the birth of the Yiddish stage and may survive its death." (In fact he predeceased it, and the Yiddish theater died off less dramatically than it might have.[4])

But pathos is for the theater. Out in the world the Jews' tradition of learning, if not their vernacular, is quite at home in the new country that invites them to master its language and allows them to enroll in its public institutions of learning:

> The public schools are filled with little Jews; the night schools of the East Side are used by practically no other race. City College, New York University, and Columbia University are graduating Russian Jews in numbers rapidly increasing. . . . Then there are innumerable boys' debating clubs, ethical clubs, and literary clubs in the East Side.

"Altogether," Hapgood concludes with the spectacular generosity of a man who has no scores to settle, "there is an excitement in ideas and an enthusiastic energy for acquiring knowledge which has interesting analogy to the hopefulness and acquisitive desire of the early Renaissance. It is a mistake to think that the young Hebrew turns naturally to trade. He turns his energy to whatever offers the best opportunities for broader life and success. Other things besides business are open to him in this country . . ." as of course they were not in the old country. What brass to bring up the Renaissance! while Henry James

[4]Typical of Golden's editing is his five-page "footnote" on this chapter of Hapgood's book: he strings together a number of jokes and anecdotes, some of them funny, about the Yiddish theater, identifies Mogalesco as a "great comedian," and otherwise his lips are sealed. According to the *Encyclopedia Judaica* (Macmillan, 1971), XV, 1088, "Mogulesko" died in 1914. Twenty pages earlier in the same volume is a summary of the decline, if not quite the demise, of the Yiddish theater since World War I.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

was still parading the slogans of the Procurator of the Holy Synod of autocratic Russia.

But then James, his nose out of joint with the smell of humanity, didn't know Moses Reicherson, seventy-three years old, living in the ghetto as a teacher of Hebrew to children, an outstanding Hebrew grammarian of the time, translator into Hebrew of Lessing, Gellert, and Krylov, author of hundreds of articles for Hebrew periodicals, of an important work on Hebrew grammar, of a Hebrew commentary on the Bible in twenty-four volumes:

> "When the national language and literature live," he said, "the nation lives; when dead, so is the nation. The holy tongue in which the Bible was written must not die. If it should, much of the truth of the Bible, many of its spiritual secrets, much of its beautiful poetry, would be lost. I have gone deep into the Bible, that greatest book, all my life, and I know many of its secrets." He beamed with pride as he said these words. . . .

Or the old popular Yiddish poet Eliakim Zunser, author of sixty-five collections of poems, "hundreds of which are sung every day to young and old throughout Russia"; "the wedding bard . . . so famous in that capacity that he went to a wedding once or twice a day," whose "part at the ceremony was to address the bride and bridegroom in verse so solemn that it would bring tears to their eyes, and then entertain the guests with burlesque lines," music as well as verse extempore, after no more preparation than "a hurried talk . . . with the wedding guests and the relatives of the couple":

> His poetry seemed to him only a detail of his life. Along with the simplicity of old age he has the maturity and aloofness of it. . . . His wife and children bent over him as he recited, and their bodies kept time with his rhythm. One of the two visitors was a Jew, whose childhood had been spent in Russia, and when Zunser read a dirge which he had composed in Russia twenty-five years ago at the death by cholera of his first wife and children—a dirge which is now chanted daily in thousands of Jewish homes in Russia—the visitor joined in, although he had not heard it for many years. Tears came to his eyes as memories of his childhood were brought up by Zunser's famous lines; his body swayed to and fro in sympathy with that of Zunser and those of the poet's second wife and her children. . . .

Or the Chekhovian sketch-writer S. Libin, "a thorough product of the sweatshop," who was "born in Russia twenty-nine years ago, and came to New York when he was twenty-two years old. For four years he worked as a capmaker in shops which were then more wretched than they are now, from sixteen to seventeen hours a day. While at

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

his task he would steal a few minutes to devote to his sketches, which he sent to the *Arbeiterzeitung*. [Abraham] Cahan recognized in Libin's misspelled, illiterate, almost illegible manuscript a quality which worthily ranked it with good realistic literature." Or the twenty-year-old Jacob Epstein, whose first commissioned work was the illustration of Hapgood's volume with beautifully quiet "drawings from life."

The Americanized "cousins" who don't appear in Hapgood's or Epstein's sketches were nevertheless very much in the picture, and Mrs. Manners' book makes clear that they had mixed feelings, if not worse, about the sudden mass immigration of East European Jews. Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise, for example, had been painstakingly trimming away Orthodox Jewish ritual into a Reform Judaism that he hoped would be "strong enough to outlive the end of the 19th century":

> Everything in East European Orthodoxy ran counter to an element which both Reform and Conservative Jews believed essential to modern Judaism—propriety, decorum. . . . *Davening*—the sing-song chanting of prayers in the Orthodox service, which few of the worshipers understood because they were in Hebrew—was done by the congregation at each person's individual pace and accompanied by his singular style of swaying back and forth for concentration. The overall impression was of a prayer race, the devout achieving a paradoxically sacred babel. But this approach to prayer simply reflected the East European's peasant relationship with God. Their everyday *shtetl* closeness to Him made for a boisterous uninhibited heartiness. God was one of them; in His presence no esthetic airs were needed. Similarly, Reform Jews saw God in the image they sought to project, a genteel American image (with just a slight German accent); therefore, their service, of necessity, had to equal in refinement that of the American Protestant. . . .
>
> To Wise, the torrent of crude, unworldly Russian Jews presented the only major obstacle to his fifty-year goal of Americanizing Judaism. . . . "Count Ignatiev," he wrote feelingly in 1882, after Ignatiev's May Laws sent steerageload after steerageload of Jews to the United States, "ought to be hanged."

The lines were drawn. " 'They are Jews,' declared Dr. Isaac Mayer Wise. 'We are Israelites.' And the Russian Jews said with equal assurance, 'We are Jews. They are goyim.' " When, after a decade of unchecked immigration, a committee of eminent American Jews "appealed to President Benjamin Harrison to remonstrate with Russia for enacting special laws which 'forced groups of its people to seek refuge in another country and that country our own,' " their motive wasn't purely humanitarian.

Yet in the worldwide Jewish crisis the record of the wealthy and influential Jews was full of instances of patience, concern, open-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

handedness, tenacity, as well as the immemorial Jewish reluctance to fight City Hall. Mrs. Manners tells a specially touching anecdote about the Baron Maurice de Hirsch. This German-Jewish financier tried in 1888 to head off further pogroms by informing the Russian government that he would donate to Jewish agencies in Russia fifty million francs to establish technical and agricultural schools for "his unhappy Russian co-religionists"; the offer was rejected even though he paid a bribe of a million francs to the infamous minister Pobyedonostsev; but he had no stomach for anything beyond toleration and survival:

> [The Zionist leader Theodor Herzl] . . . suggested that Baron de Hirsch sponsor a contest for Jews in the major anti-Semitic countries for "deeds of great moral beauty, for courage, self-sacrifice, virtuous conduct, notable achievements in art and science . . . in short for everything great." When Herzl assured him that this would achieve "a general uplift among Jews," Baron de Hirsch interrupted, crying out piteously: "No, no, no! I do not want to raise the general level. All of our misfortunes come from the fact that the Jews want to climb too high. We have too much brains. My intention is to restrain the Jews from pushing ahead. They shouldn't make such great progress. All of the hatred against us stems from this. . . ."

In the land of the free, Rabbi Joseph Krauskopf opened the National Farm School in 1897 with the aim of turning ghetto boys into "a toiling class" of farmers. "When a young immigrant visited Dr. Krauskopf and asked for his help in continuing his medical studies at the Jefferson Medical College . . . Krauskopf brusquely told him, 'I can do nothing for you. We have too many doctors as it is.'" By 1905 one of the trustees suggested discontinuing the school because "Jewish boys are not willing to do what we want them to do"—i.e., become "farmers pure and simple"—and in 1918 the trustees acknowledged their failure by closing the school, which had turned out mainly "bacteriologists, plant pathologists, horticulturists, entomologists, farm economists and statisticians, teachers, veterinarians—even an editor of an agricultural journal."

Other benevolent and apprehensive American Jews (Rabbi Wise among them) tried to appease City Hall by virtually shanghaiing, with no preparation at all, trainloads of immigrants on tragicomic excursions to Louisiana, Kansas, Arkansas, Oregon, and Colorado to found farming communities, "because there was no better way to destroy the ignoble stereotype of the Jew as a peddler and petty tradesman than to make him a man of the soil." Mrs. Manners quotes from a report by a young Cincinnati Jew, Charles K. Davis, in charge of a group of sixty men, women, and children bound for western Kansas; at a stopover in Kansas City, Davis was having trouble with Skwerski, Roseman, Braselawski, Sasewitz, Boxer, and Sussman ("the two latter are developing into first-class rascals"): "I want to hide their

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

conduct from the people of Kansas City, especially the Gentiles, who have never seen Russians before, because I don't want them to form a poor opinion of our people. . . ." Meanwhile, in American magazines of the time, writers were explaining why Jews lived in tenements ("their in-born love of money-making leads them to crowd into the smallest quarters"); an expert on crime hazarded the opinion that "Most Hebrews commit their crimes for gain"; "the fact that 'some chiefs of police will not tolerate a Jewish prostitute in their city because they find it impossible to subject her to regulations' revealed to the sociologist the stubborn contentiousness of Jews and, to those who probed even more deeply, a covetousness which led Jewish prostitutes to refuse to pay police graft"; according to *World's Week* (in 1904), the reason that "No Jew has ever been tried for rape in the state of Ohio, which has a Jewish population of 150,000," may well be "the notorious Jewish dislike of struggle, of good hard physical labor." It's easy to understand why Charles K. Davis hoped to keep the malefactions of Boxer and Sussman out of the public eye.

Americanization was the aim. In the Educational Alliance (according to its president, "educational, humanitarian, philanthropic, and patriotic in the broadest sense"), which the uptown philanthropists established in the ghetto, nearly everything cultural was permitted except the speaking, reading, and writing of Yiddish. Imagine how the Orthodox, the socialists, and the Yiddish playwrights reacted to *that!* "In 1901, led by . . . Jacob Gordin, they organized their own settlement house, the Educational League," in celebration of which Gordin wrote a play called *The Benefactors of the East Side.* At one point "Ashley Jefferson Yoshke" (a takeoff on the philanthropist Jacob Schiff) declares that the benefactors, by "uplifting" the East Side Jews, will be in the tradition of Lincoln: "Of course the East Side is not black, but they are Rumanian. True, they are not Ethiopians, but they are Russians."

But Schiff and his partner in almost all his philanthropic ventures, the constitutional lawyer Louis Marshall, were strong, brave, intelligent men, capable of demanding to his face that President Taft abrogate a century-old treaty with Russia because it penalized American citizens who happened to be Jews, and then, when he refused, mounting a public campaign that forced him to change his mind; capable of demanding and receiving from Henry Ford a recantation and apology (which Marshall wrote and Ford signed) for Ford's seven-year rash of anti-Semitism in the Dearborn *Independent;* always ready, with whatever qualifications or ulterior motives, to give time and money and attention. It's the particular virtue of *Poor Cousins* that Mrs. Manners' abundant, sometimes disorderly documentation goes to prove her entertaining thesis that, uptown and downtown, the Jews were a match for each other.

Portal to America has no thesis, its form is ampler and more exact-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ing: the form coincides with Schoener's decision to trust the documentation itself, the very *Zeitgeist* speaking, time past as time present, before the valuable dust gets shaken out through the sieve of history. Here's a paragraph of a story ("Sweatshop Girl Tailors") from the New York *Tribune* of June 18, 1897:

> Miss Minnie Rosen, who is a young woman of the thinking kind, says that all the girls demand are living wages and fifty-nine hours work a week instead of the present system of one hundred eight hours work weekly on salaries ranging from $3 to $6 weekly, according to the size and age of the worker. Miss Rosen is a finisher and lives in a three-room flat on the top floor of No. 248 Monroe Street where she is assisted in providing the family living by a sister and two brothers, who make cigars and peddle around the tenement district. She speaks Yiddish with the usual gurgling sound and speaks English with her tongue, two most expressive hands, and a cultured shrug of the shoulders that says volumes and must eventually straighten the shoulders, now slightly rounded by the sewing machine. She says "vell" in a way that no linguist on earth can properly translate. If she says it about the contractor, it may mean anything; if she speaks of "the boss," it implies all manner of things; and if applied to herself, it means that there is no one like unto her in woe.

"Jew Babes at the Library," from the Evening *Post* of October 3, 1903, begins with an image of hunger ("Lines of children reaching down two flights of stairs and into the street may not infrequently be seen at the Chatham Square branch of the Public Library when school closes at three o'clock in the afternoon . . .") and ends with "English as she is spoken" by the children at the library:

> "Dasent" is used in more ways than an American would ever think of. "Those things dasent be touched," they will say. "He's a murder," will succinctly describe a disagreeable person, and "I have a mad on her" sufficiently depicts a slight difference of opinion. He's come to be joined into the library" is the accepted form of introduction for a new friend. The installment plan seems graven in the nature of these infants. They wish to pay their fines a penny a day even when they have the whole amount in their pockets. "I might as well be getting the interest on this as you," said one boy frankly of a three-cent fine. Excuses for maltreated books give glimpses of home life. "The baby dropped it in the herring" is the favorite explanation for a soiled cover.

Unabashed personal voices invent the suffragette and the American labor movement, as well as the Jewish conviction that books get into everything and have all the answers. A change in the quality of life occurs because the Bureau of Public Works replaces cobblestones with

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

asphalt on the streets of the ghetto (New York *Tribune,* July 5, 1896):

> The smoothness is perhaps the chief element in their adaptability to the sports of childhood. . . .
> . . . The children being on the street, there is more room on the sidewalk for their elders. Chairs are brought out on the sidewalk, and the curbstones furnish seats for many. With the old paving materials, the gutters were more or less unclean and noisome, but the asphalt makes the curbstone really an attractive place to sit.
>
> When it is called to mind that a certain East Side block has 3,700 dwellers, it is easy to believe that these streets are crowded on summer evenings. . . . Someone has said that there is not standing room at one time on these East Side streets for all the people that live in them. . . .

The report of The Tenement House Committee to the New York State Legislature (New York *Times,* January 18, 1895) notes that Sanitary District A, of the Eleventh Ward (populated almost entirely by Jewish immigrants), contained on June 1, 1894 as many as 986.4 persons per acre, the next most densely populated area in the world for which there was any record being a district in Bombay, which in 1881 contained 759.66 persons per acre. (The major influx of Jewish immigration didn't come till after 1903, with a corresponding impact on the population density of the East Side.)

East Side youths congregate nightly in candy stores (or, summers, on the sidewalks just outside, as the story fails to add) for talk, cards, and general socializing (New York *Tribune,* April 22, 1900):

> A counter along the length of the store decked with cheap candies and perhaps with cigars, some shelving behind filled with cigar and cigarette boxes, and invariably a soda water fountain make up the entire furniture of the store, if we except a few cigarette pictures on the wall. Usually the proprietor lives with his family in the rear of the store. Some stores, making a pretense to stylishness, have partitioned off a little room from the store to which they give the elegant name of "ice cream parlor," a sign over the door to that effect apprising you of its existence. One or two bare tables and a few chairs furnish the "ice cream parlor." But this little room is very useful as a meeting place for a small club for boys or as a general lounging room. . . .

The newspaper items range from a description of the compulsory shower baths for all the immigrants at Ellis Island, through every political, economic, educational, and social issue involving the immigrants, to a bouquet of the heartfelt Letters to the Editor ("Bintel Briefs") of the *Forward,* in which a worker confides his verdict on a fellow-worker ("Nothing in the world interests him. He hates music,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the theater, and socialism"), or a sufferer sums up with brevity and vigor the accumulated miseries of mankind:

February 27, 1906

Dear Mr. Editor of the *Forward:*

I read the troubles of family life in your "Bintel Brief" each day very attentively. But my own troubles are so great, so enormous, that I would not even ask you for your permission to print my few words in your paper, as others do, but simply, I ask you right on the spot: Help!

Your Constant Reader

What the newspaper items don't cover, the photographs do. Art photographs of an angled slab of a power plant, posed portraits, frames of Old Faithful or the Leaning Tower are imitations of paintings or mere reminders. But snapshots of people and lived-in places, trapped in the light of the past, age into a fearful irrecoverable clarity even in the most predictable instances. The instances that Schoener chooses are without exception transitory and important, and the sheaves of photographs are the prize of his wonderful book: Hester Street in the light of day, tenements, awnings, pushcarts, bearded men with hats on, long-skirted women walking; an Armenian Jew with unbelievable direct bright eyes, at Ellis Island; a cluster of Italian boys, grinning and clowning for the camera, on Mulberry Street; families of garment-workers at their "homework"; a shoemaker on Broome Street; a sly-looking Lothario-type among other men and boys in a sweatshop in 1889; the last meeting of the Garment Workers' Strike in 1913 (the sign held up among them is in Yiddish); victims of the Triangle Fire laid out side by side in their coffins; a boy in a littered tenement hall filling a pan from a communal tap; a middle-aged man with a full square black beard, sitting in what looks like the corner of a wooden shack, at a table holding an unbroken loaf of twist bread, "Making Ready for the Sabbath" in 1890; a bathtub stuck forever in an airshaft between two tenements. They were all here; and here they are.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Letters to the Editor

[*Ed. Note: The following correspondence was received prior to the publication of our Spring, 1972 issue, but too late for insertion in that issue.*]

Dear Sir:

I am writing you in regard to Vernon Young's poetry review in your Winter 1971-72 issue. I can appreciate his pointing out the vapidness of Arthur Gregor's writing as well as his uneasiness with Robert Bly's trying to shove Neruda down our throats as a means to his own self-advancement—however, anyone should be able to spot Gregor and Bly who is sensitive to language and poetry. What disturbs me enough to write you about Young's review is that in it there is no attention to more demanding work; Young seems like an uptight wanderer out of the nineteenth century who feels poets should be self-effacing and decorous, taking those words as his staminal virtues. Not only does he thus praise and comment at length on second-rate poetry (presumably because it stays in its place), but he avoids confronting true energy and imagination at all. I am going to quote his entire "review" of Robert Kelly's *Flesh Dream Book:*

> Robert Kelly's photograph ratifies the content of his fat, fat book: bushy eyebrows and beard—the prophet. He's an Anabaptist corrupted further by Rousseau, William Blake and The Book of Mormon. Sometimes he sounds as if he were parodying a Jeffers who had sat at the feet of Allen Ginsberg. His sonnets are not bad.

Is that a REVIEW? Since the man is fat don't read him? He has a beard ergo he is a fake prophet? That kind of backbiting and hopelessly non sequitur observation, coupled with no curiosity, is what I try to pry nineteen-year-old students out of at the California Institute of the Arts. I am particularly sensitive to Young's scurviness regarding Kelly because I admire Kelly's poetry a great deal; however, others get worse treatment than Kelly. To make a trinity out of Creeley, Kaplan and Tate, as three poets who "are chiefly writing poems about their tacit disbelief that they're poets at all" is to so minimize any man or woman's work that quality and individual difference are utterly squashed. Robert Creeley does not deserve such treatment regardless the slimness or occasional quality of a particular collection because he has made a genuine contribution to American poetry over the past twenty years—but neither does James Tate! I don't personally give a fig for Tate's writing but I would rush to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Notes on contributors

MARK VAN DOREN's* most recent volume of poems is *That Shining Place,* 1969. He has a new volume in preparation, probably for 1974.

CARLOS DRUMMOND DE ANDRADE* (b. 1902), the great poet of Modernism's second generation and heir to Manuel Bandeira, is perhaps the most complex and illustrious Brazilian poet of the twentieth century. THOMAS COLCHIE is preparing a study of João Cabral de Melo Neto's poetry for Twayne, and his translation of the *Prison Memoirs* of the late Brazilian novelist, Graciliano Ramos, will be published next year by M. Evans & Co.

J. E. CHAMBERLIN* is Assistant Professor in the Department of English at the University of Toronto, Canada. He has just completed a book on Paul Klee. This essay is his first published work in the United States.

WILLIAM STAFFORD recently was a writer in residence at Ohio Wesleyan University. He has since resumed teaching at Lewis and Clark College, after a year as Poetry Consultant at the Library of Congress.

CHARLES TOMLINSON's latest volume, *Written on Water,* is due from Oxford University this fall. *Renga,* a four-man poem, with Octavio Paz, Jacques Roubaud and Edoardo Sanguineti, has recently appeared from Braziller, as has *William Carlos Williams* in the Penguin Critical Anthology.

R. G. VLIET is the author of *Events and Celebrations: Poems* (Viking) and *The Man with the Black Mouth: Poems* (Kayak). He lives on a farm in Vermont.

ROBERT HASS lives and writes in Berkeley.

PO FEI HUANG* was born and educated in China, where he worked as a newspaperman during World War I. After the war, he was editor-in-chief of the *Nationalist Daily* in Hong Kong and later of *Young China* in San Francisco. Since 1952, he has been teaching Chinese at Yale University. He has published four volumes of Chinese poems in Hong Kong and Taiwan during the last two decades.

WILLIAM DICKEY's latest volume of poetry is *More Under Saturn* (Wesleyan University Press).

ZULFIKAR GHOSE lives in Austin and teaches at the University of Texas. His new book of poems, *The Violent West,* has just appeared from Macmillan (London). His third novel, *The Incredible Brazilian,* is to be published in New York in the fall by Holt, Rinehart & Winston.

JAMES P. DEGNAN is Professor of English at the University of Santa Clara. He has published fiction and non-fiction in many magazines.

Asterisk indicates a new contributor.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

defend him or any other poet against Vernon Young's aping of creativity in high falutin pedantic style more like run-of-the-mill restaurant reviewing than the basic attention *any reviewed book of poems deserves.*

CLAYTON ESHLEMAN

Sherman Oaks, California

Dear Sir:

I don't know by what democratic principle this barbarian is entitled to a special hearing. To answer his letter is to honor it. I wonder if you realize the source of his irritations; it predates *my* review. In HR, Spring 1970 (XXIII, 1) Hayden Carruth reviewed Eshleman's poems, by no means affirmatively, and in the same article he reviewed Creeley at greater length than I have done and more tactfully, yet I'd scarcely describe his comments as recommendation! Now Eshleman has been provided with the opportunity for avenging himself under cover of defending Creeley, Kelly and (with spiteful reservations) Tate. What is this character really saying? That it's all right for me to deprecate Gregor and Robert Bly—I have *his* sanction!—but if I don't take *his* favorites seriously I am of the nineteenth century and fit object for his abuse. ". . . the basic attention any reviewed volume of poems deserves," he splutters. If *I* am the one who is reviewing, *I* decide how much attention any given volume "deserves." *I* decide—and for the opinions of 50,000 Eshlemans I couldn't care less.

VERNON YOUNG

Stockholm, Sweden

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Review 72 73 74 75

Views/Reviews and Interviews on Latin American Literature

Published three times a year SPRING/FALL/WINTER

Subscribe Now!

Review
Center for Inter-American Relations
680 Park Avenue
New York, N.Y. 10021

Please send me REVIEW for one year (3 issues) commencing with the_____issue

I enclose $3.00

NAME

ADDRESS

CITY STATE ZIP

Review
Center for Inter-American Relations
680 Park Avenue
New York, N.Y. 10021

Please send me REVIEW for one year (3 issues) commencing with the_____issue

I enclose $3.00

NAME

ADDRESS

CITY STATE ZIP

A publication of the Center for Inter-American Relations

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

NEW BOOKS FROM

Stephen Dobyns

CONCURRING BEASTS. The Lamont Poetry Selection for 1971. An exciting first book of poems, chosen for the award by James Merrill, Richard Howard, and Michael Benedikt. Paperback, $3.95

Philip Levine

THEY FEED THEY LION. A new book of poems by one of the outstanding poets writing in America today. Paperback, $3.95

George MacBeth

COLLECTED POEMS 1958-1970. A full selection from the work of one of the few current English poets requiring attention. $7.50

Brock Brower

THE LATE GREAT CREATURE. "It's absolutely wonderful. I rejoiced in being trapped by his first two narrators into not being prepared for the true genius of his hero."—*John Hollander* $6.95

Richard J. Barnet

THE ROOTS OF WAR: The Men and Institutions Behind U.S. Foreign Policy. A searching and disturbing look at the men and mentality that determine how American power is used throughout the world. $10

Joseph Chaikin

THE PRESENCE OF THE ACTOR. A book about acting, disguises and repression, by the director of The Open Theater. Illustrated. $6.95

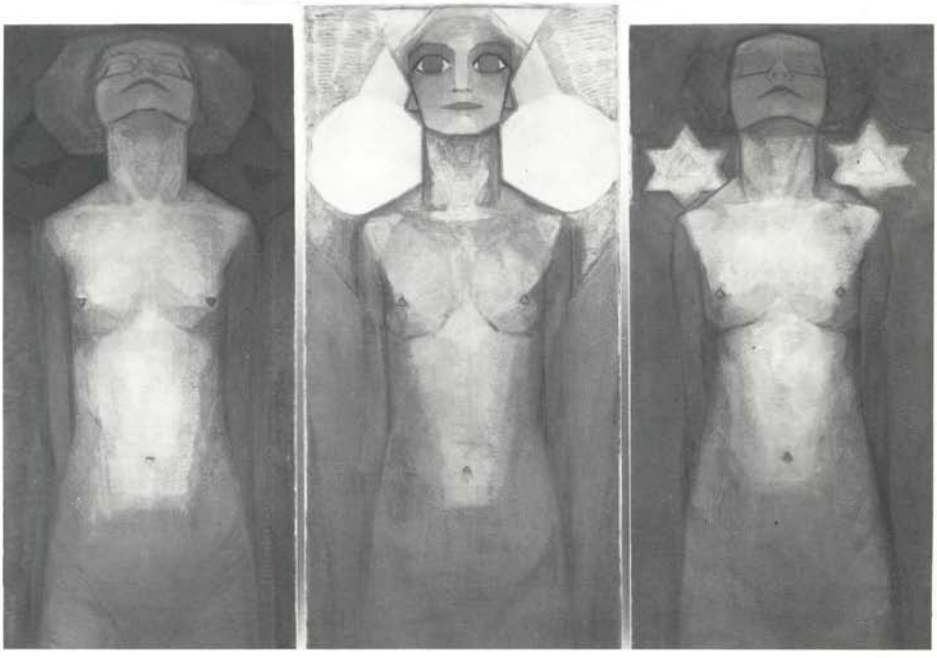
Reynolds Price

THINGS THEMSELVES: Essays and Scenes. Essays on Faulkner, Hemingway, Welty, Milton, and Rembrandt, and scenes from a screenplay of *A Long and Happy Life.* $8.95

Now at your bookstore

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Mill by Moonlight
c. 1907—early 1908 39¼ × 49½" oil on canvas
(Collection Gemeentemuseum, The Hague)



Evolution
c. 1911 oil on canvas
Three panels: 70⅛ × 33⅛"; 72½ × 34½"; 70⅛ × 33⅛"
(Collection Gemeentemuseum, The Hague)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

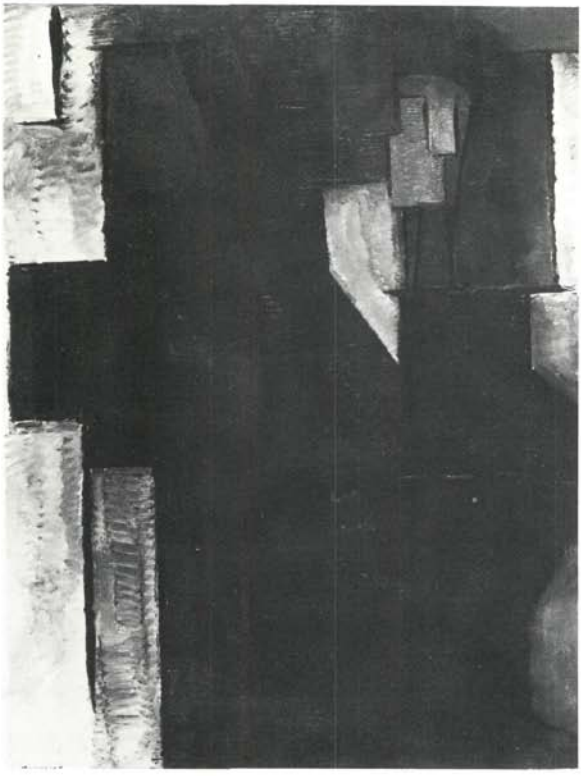
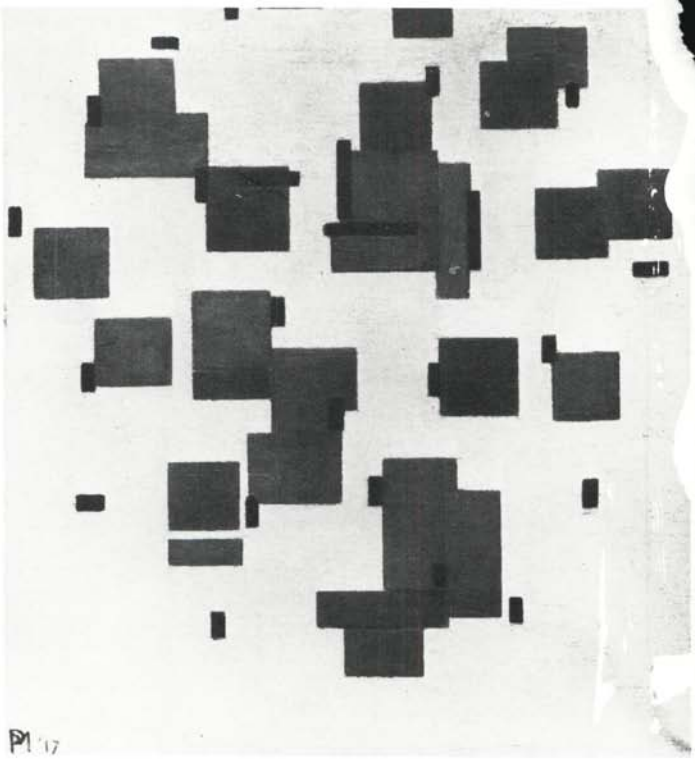
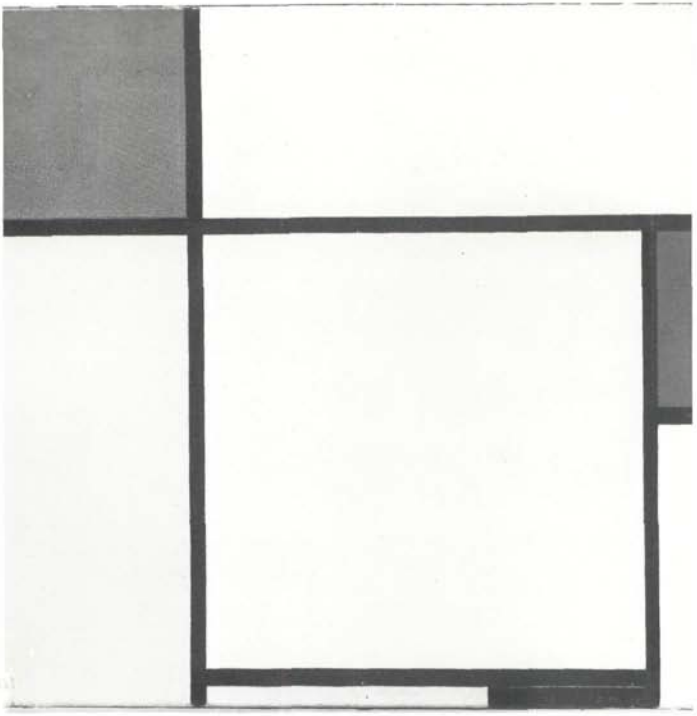


Figure Study
Winter 1911-1912
45¼ × 34⅝″
oil on canvas
(Bequest of Mr. S. B. Slijper meentemuseum, The Hague)

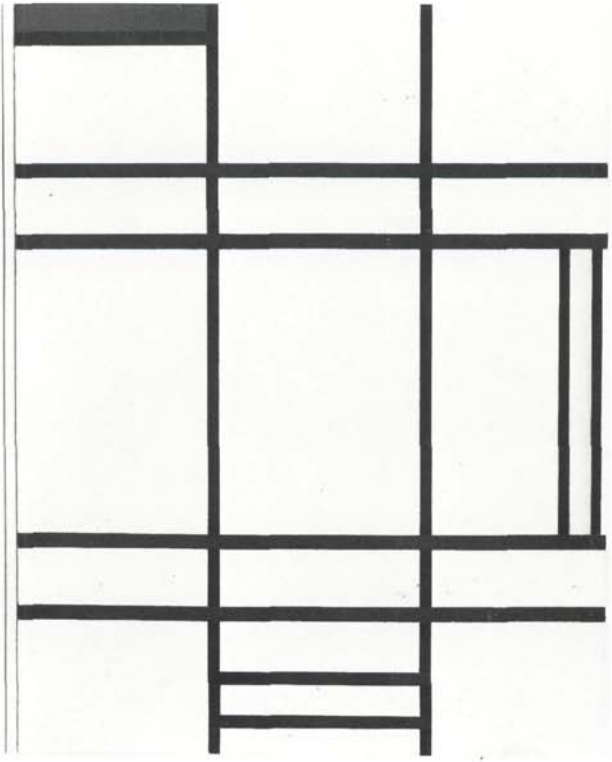


Composition in Color B
Late 1916—early 1917
19¾ × 17¼″
oil on canvas
(Collection Rijksmuseum Kroller-Muller, Otterlo, The Netherlands)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

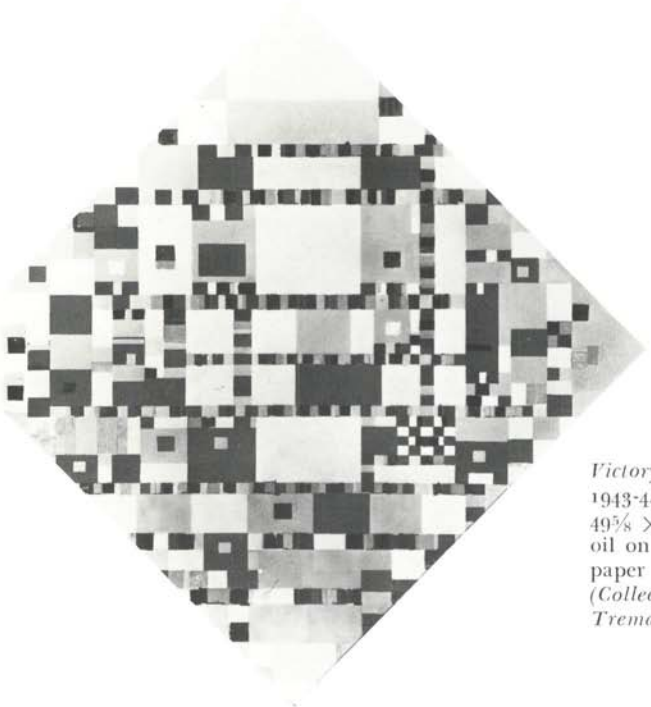


Composition
1929
17¾ × 17¾"
oil on canvas
(Collection The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; gift of Katherine S. Dreier Estate)



Composition in White, Red and Yellow
1938
31⅜ × 24⅛"
oil on canvas
(Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Mr. and Mrs. William Preston Harrison Collection)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



Victory Boogie Woogie
1943-44
49⅝ × 49⅝″
oil on canvas with colored tape and paper
(Collection Mr. and Mrs. Burton Tremaine, Meriden, Connecticut)

Blue Chrysanthemum
c. early 1920's
10⅝ × 8⅞″
watercolor and ink
(Collection The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York)

(Composition in White, Red and Yellow courtesy Los Angeles County Museum of Art; all other photographs courtesy The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York)

LICENSED TO SNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED